MYTHS AND CRISES: AMERICAN MASCULINITY
IN 1980s VIETNAM WAR FILMS

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Art of War Scholars

by

ALICIA M. BURROWS, MAJOR, U.S. ARMY
B.A., Colby College, Waterville, Maine, 2004
MBA, The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, 2012

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2015

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		*Form Approved* *OMB No. 0704-0188*

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)* 12-06-2015	2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis	3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)* AUG 2014 – JUN 2015
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Myths and Crises: American Masculinity in 1980s Vietnam War Films		**5a. CONTRACT NUMBER**
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Alicia M. Burrows, U.S. Army		**5d. PROJECT NUMBER**
		5e. TASK NUMBER
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301		**8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER**
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		**10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)**
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited		
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		

14. ABSTRACT

Throughout history, military service and wars have served as rites of passage for young men and often defined American manhood itself. Films about war capture this masculine journey and reveal myths about war service and American masculinity. Five films comprise the foundation of this study. *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Hamburger Hill* (1987), *Casualties of War* (1989), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) were all released in the mid-to-late 1980s and reflect a resurgence in national attention on the troubling war. The films question the following national myths about norms of masculinity: the World War II American war hero, war service as a path to manhood, and a monolithic American masculinity. Aggressive efforts to restore American confidence and masculinity characterized the beginning of the 1980s with the election of President Ronald Reagan and the rise of the New Right's influence. The films reveal a tempering of the bravado and hypermasculinity promulgated in the earlier eighties and depict a more nuanced performance of masculinity. The study provides insight into the role masculinity plays in society and, specifically, the military, and provides a contextual framework for analyzing masculinity in film.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Masculinity, Manhood, Gender, 1980s, American masculinity, Reagan, War films, Vietnam War films, Vietnam War, Film

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			**17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT**	**18. NUMBER OF PAGES**	**19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON**
a. REPORT (U)	**b. ABSTRACT** (U)	**c. THIS PAGE** (U)	(U)	134	**19b. PHONE NUMBER** *(include area code)*

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Major Alicia M. Burrows

Thesis Title:　　Myths and Crises: American Masculinity in 1980s Vietnam War Films

Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chair
Janet G. Valentine, Ph.D.

_____, Member
Gregory S. Hospodor, Ph.D.

_____, Member
Dale F. Spurlin, Ph.D.

Accepted this 12th day of June 2015 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

MYTHS AND CRISES: AMERICAN MASCULINITY IN 1980s VIETNAM WAR FILMS, by Major Alicia M. Burrows, 134 pages.

Throughout history, military service and wars have served as rites of passage for young men and often defined American manhood itself. Films about war capture this masculine journey and reveal myths about war service and American masculinity. Five films comprise the foundation of this study. *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Hamburger Hill* (1987), *Casualties of War* (1989), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) were all released in the mid-to-late 1980s and reflect a resurgence in national attention on the troubling war. The films question the following national myths about norms of masculinity: the World War II American war hero, war service as a path to manhood, and a monolithic American masculinity. Aggressive efforts to restore American confidence and masculinity characterized the beginning of the 1980s with the election of President Ronald Reagan and the rise of the New Right's influence. The films reveal a tempering of the bravado and hypermasculinity promulgated in the earlier eighties and depict a more nuanced performance of masculinity. The study provides insight into the role masculinity plays in society and, specifically, the military, and provides a contextual framework for analyzing masculinity in film.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> Private Joker: Is that you, John Wayne? Is this me?
> Private Cowboy: Hey, start the cameras. This is "Vietnam - the Movie."
> Private Eightball: Yeah, Joker can be John Wayne. I'll be a horse.
> Donlon: T.H.E. Rock can be a rock.
> T.H.E. Rock: I'll be Ann-Margret.
> Doc Jay: Animal Mother can be a rabid buffalo.
> Crazy Earl: I'll be General Custer.
> Private Rafterman: Well, who'll be the Indians?
> Animal Mother: Hey, we'll let the gooks play the Indians.
>   —Stanley Kubrick, dir. *Full Metal Jacket*

The epigraph is from Director Stanley Kubrick's popular and well-known

Vietnam War film *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). In the film, the scene portrays a squad of

Marines—each with distinctive nicknames—on patrol in Vietnam. The dialogue between

the Marines captures references to Western and World War II film hero John Wayne, and

frontier staples such as buffalos and Indians. Private Cowboy's comment, "This is

'Vietnam – the Movie'," acknowledges his awareness of the Marines as performers and

Vietnam as the stage of their movie.[1] Private Joker raises the existential question of his

own role in this movie with the comment, "Is this me?"[2] His question suggests confusion,

perhaps at the lack of transference of his youthful preparation for war by playing

cowboys and Indians to his current situation in Vietnam. Connections between the

Marines' roles as Vietnam War participants and Western film iconography are not

coincidental. John Wayne himself easily moved between roles in Westerns and World

---

[1] *Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (Warner Brothers Picture, 1987), DVD (Warner Brothers Pictures, 2007).

[2] Ibid.

War II films. The irony that many young American men grew up and were inspired by national myths of the World War II hero and Western frontier through film, only to serve in a completely different type of war, is evident throughout Vietnam War films.

Films often reflect the cultural state of the period during which they were made rather than the historical time upon which they were based. Vietnam War films made in the 1980s are no different; they attempt to interpret the Vietnam experience from a 1980s cultural perspective. This study examines what films released from 1986 to 1989 say about shifting concepts of American masculinity. The primary research question is: How do Vietnam War films released between 1986 to 1989 reflect societal perceptions of American masculinity?

Secondary research questions include: How did the definition or understanding of American masculinity shift from World War II to the 1980s?; how do Vietnam War films treat American masculinity with respect to gender, race, and sexual orientation?; what shifts in American masculinity might be portrayed in future Iraq and Afghanistan War films, and what will these shifts say about contemporary culture?

Throughout history, military service and war have served as rites of passage for young men and often defined American manhood itself. Films about war capture this masculine journey and perpetuate myths about war service and American masculinity. The military and war are manifestations of American masculinity, and film is a medium through which this masculinity is created and disseminated. Films used in this study contradict the following national myths about norms of masculinity: the World War II American war hero, war service as a path to manhood, and a monolithic American masculinity.

The war's effect on the American psyche as the first war that tested national myths cannot be discounted. The absence of a clear military victory challenged perceptions of American masculinity in society and the military. The Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, and the Gay Liberation movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s also caused immense cultural turmoil and challenged traditional gender norms. Anti-war protestors helped make the war untenable and anti-military sentiment was pervasive throughout the nation. The loss of American prestige and military dominance abroad coupled with enormous social change during this period had a profound effect on American society. American men, in particular, felt the effects of the cultural shifts in terms of their own status and place in America.

Five films comprise the foundation of this study. *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Hamburger Hill* (1987), *Casualties of War* (1989), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) were all released in the mid-to-late 1980s and reflect a resurgence in national attention on the troubling war. This study's focus on films that portrayed combat is two-fold. First, these films show a maturation of the genre, and portray the war experience more than the effects of war. Secondly, the relative popularity and financial success of these films—*Platoon* grossed $137 million, third out of all 1986 films— suggest that they resonated with audiences in a way that earlier films did not.[3] Why was the American public ready and willing to hear these Vietnam War stories during the mid-to-late-1980s rather than during or directly after the war? Perhaps enough national healing had occurred in the interim that films could start to address the war and the

---

[3] Stephen Prince, *American Cinema of the 1980s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 148.

3

controversial topics that made it unpopular. Audiences see films in part to experience

pleasure. This pleasure has psychological, emotional, and personal roots.[4] *Platoon* and

Born on the Fourth of July's Academy Awards and box-office success clearly indicate

that film critics and the movie-going public found something entertaining about these

films.

Beginning with an overview of the evolution of historical and war films, chapter 1

explores the connections between war and gender, along with film's importance in

revealing these connections. Film's portrayal of issues of societal anxiety is also

explored. Chapter 2 lays out a framework of masculinity, and provides a narrative history

of masculinity from a sociohistorical perspective including important political, economic,

and cultural factors starting with the Great Depression. Beginning with this period

provides context to masculinity as an ever-evolving phenomenon. A short history of

masculinity also reveals another of its key components and a common source of crisis, its

plurality; despite what national myths may claim, there is no one monolithic American

masculinity. Changes in access to institutions of power, economic opportunities, and

gender relations all contribute to shifts in masculinity.[5] Chapter 3 traces the turmoil of the

previous decades' continued effects on the political, economic, and social aspects of

1980s life. Aggressive efforts to restore American confidence and masculinity

characterized the beginning of the 1980s with the election of President Ronald Reagan

and the rise of the New Right's influence. The emergence of this hypermasculinity was a

---

[4] Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 27.

[5] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 191.

response to the social movements of the previous decades and the loss in Vietnam, both of which undermined American masculinity. Chapter 4 analyzes the five Vietnam War films—*Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Hamburger Hill*, *Casualties of War*, and *Born on the Fourth of July*—within the framework of masculinity, and connects the films' portrayal of masculinity to the 1980s social history discussed in the second and third chapters. The films reveal critiques of national myths of norms of masculinity that emerged out of World War II. The mid-to-late 1980s—when these films were released—also marked a tempering of the bravado and hypermasculinity initially promulgated and the films depicted a more nuanced performance of masculinity.

The concluding chapter discusses the significance of the films in understanding masculinity's role in American society, and especially in war. The films show that the myths of the American war hero created in World War II films and war service as a path to manhood failed men of the Vietnam War generation. American men were forced to question the manhood model that came out of World War II, the post-war years of the 1950s, and the early 1960s. The 1980s films reveal changes in masculinity that emphasize its fluidity, not just in response to the Vietnam War, but also to the cultural turmoil that continued from the 1960s and 1970s into the 1980s. The interconnection between all of these important cultural events is too tight to disentangle. The continual crisis in masculinity throughout American history and especially in conjunction with war remains relevant. The aftershocks of ten plus years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq have yet to be fully explored, especially with respect to masculinity. Although history does not repeat itself, similarities with Vietnam on the macro-level abound, including an ambiguous military outcome, a lack of substantial film commentary during hostilities,

and the compounding factor of immense social change during the same time period. This study of Vietnam War films will not answer all of the questions regarding the present state of American masculinity or effects of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, but serves as a contextual framework for understanding how masculinity shifts over time. War films reflect these changes.

CHAPTER 2

WAR FILMS AND MASCULINITY

> For the vast majority of Americans, film—in its various manifestations in movies and on TV—has not only assumed the proportions of literary experience, but has augmented if not replaced written history as a repository of images and information. Film has established itself as a major medium by which our culture reflects and shapes its reality with a speed and scope previously unimagined or experienced. History becomes myth even before it has a chance to be history.
> —Bruce Taylor, "The Vietnam War Movie"

Film enables the consumption of information via the powerful dynamic of spectacle.[6] The history film, in particular, plays a powerful role in this storytelling, which in turn influences American society's understanding of the past.[7] From the beginning of motion pictures, social history has provided film the most abundant source of material and the two have experienced a complicated relationship constructed around layers of meaning.[8]

The birth of war films coincides with the invention of modern cinematography and historical films.[9] War films engage at least one of the following: combat, activities of the combatants off the battlefield, and war's effect on human relationships.[10] The war

---

[6] James Chapman, *War and Film* (London, England: Reaktion, 2008), 37.

[7] Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 1.

[8] William Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1995), 15.

[9] Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 29.

[10] Robert T. Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film* (Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 45.

film genre grew out of a commercial desire to inform the public about events in Cuba and the Philippines during the Spanish-American War in the late 1890s.[11] These early films were primarily special combat documentaries or reenactments that were released to provide the American public an update on the progress of the war; they were not the typical plot-driven war film produced today.[12] Early war films served to not only inform, but also to intentionally mobilize the public for war.[13] The effectiveness of the Spanish-American War films can, in part, be measured by the popularity of the war and the fact that more men volunteered to serve than could be accepted into the military.[14]

While war has certainly shaped film, a reciprocal relationship can be argued that film has also shaped war. As Joker's comment in the introduction's epigraph suggests, young American men of his generation typically understood war as film; certainly, for those young men coming of age in the 1960s, their understanding of war was shaped by the consumption of countless World War II films. Their comprehension of war was closely connected to film and film's representation of war. War films' depiction of "heroism, masculinity, and comradeship" represented an informal socialization process that affected how young men ultimately performed in war.[15]

---

[11] Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, 7.

[12] Chapman, 53.

[13] John W. Chambers and David Culbert, *World War II, Film and History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

[14] Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood* (New Have, CT: Tale University Press, 2000), 6.

[15] Chapman, 248.

A common question that challenges the historical film category is whether a film's re-creation of the past through visual images is authentic and accurately reflects the historical record. Re-enactment of historical events requires, to a certain extent, a "re-thinking of the past" through the lens of the present.[16] These films are as much about perceptions of the event when the film was made as the actual historical event itself.[17] There is tremendous value in what the interpretation of that history says about the society's views on the event. The construction of the past is shaped and informed by the context of the period when the film was made, thus film offers its own way of "imagining the past."[18] Film, then, plays the dual role of interpreter of social history and "mass cultural diffuser" distributing that interpretation to the American public.[19] Filmmakers play an important role in defining cultural norms and creating or perpetuating national myths. They have a financial incentive to explore social history topics that interest the American movie-going public.[20]

Historical films have the ability to emotionally connect the audience to a past event and "awaken a powerful sense of national belonging or a probing sense of national self-scrutiny."[21] As part of popular culture, films have been recognized as playing a

---

[16] Burgoyne, 8.

[17] Bruce Taylor, "The Vietnam War Movie," in *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination*, ed. D. Michael Shafer (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1990), 187.

[18] Burgoyne, 11.

[19] Palmer, 11.

[20] Ibid., xi.

[21] Burgoyne, 2.

significant contributing role in discourse revolving around various American identities.[22] These identities—masculinity included—are neither natural nor entirely constructed by some overarching determinant force; rather, they are in a constant state of construction from history, geography, culture, politics, institutions, and religion.[23] Film's ability to inform and challenge identities is particularly clear in interpretations of contentious historical events.[24] Historical film's role as catalysts of public debate is evident from the very beginning of cinematography.[25]

The role of the war film in serving as a vehicle to inform the public has persisted to present-day, and the film's representation is often accepted as the real version of history.[26] D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) is important in historical film canon not only for its technical achievements in terms of film making, but the fact that although it dramatized the Civil War, it simultaneously exposed the state of American race relations in the early twentieth century by blatantly supporting the South's position during the Civil War.[27] The *Birth of a Nation* elicited strong reactions, both positive and negative, from the American public that reflected on-going racial tensions within the United States, including the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan.[28] This film "provoked

---

[22] Chapman, 243.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Burgoyne, 2.

[25] Ibid., 1.

[26] Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, 52.

[27] Ibid., 16.

[28] Ibid.

controversy and widespread public debate about the meaning of the past, about the limits of dramatic interpretation, and about the power of film to influence popular understanding and to promote particular national myths."[29] Film's ability to bring history to life for American audiences has dramatically increased since the release of this forerunner to modern film, and lends credence to the notion of "cultural memory"—memory that is usually nation specific and revolves around a significant historical event.[30]

Another example of such an event for the United States is World War II and the continuing national popular memory, and mythology, of it as "the good war."[31] A good war in this sense is fought out of necessity for morally defensible reasons. National myths often are born out of specific historical events that unveiled contradictions within society. Throughout American history, war has served to expose frictions within society that required examination to promote understanding. Films often engage these subjects, with war as a significant source of friction that has had a tremendous and enduring impact on American culture. [32] Thus, analyzing film leads to a deeper understanding of the sources and effects of friction and American culture generally. In addition to the relationship between film and war is the extremely intimate connection between war and gender;

---

[29] Burgoyne, 22.

[30] Chambers and Culbert, 147; Chapman, 137.

[31] Christina S. Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity during World War II* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 184.

[32] Robert T. Eberwein, *Armed Forces: Masculinity and Sexuality in the American War Film* (Brunswich, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 9.

indeed, a connection so strong that it can be argued that one does not survive without the other.[33]

War and masculinity are inseparable in American culture. Although complex and layered, there are clear connections among masculinity, war, the military, and the nation. As a historically all-male institution, the military has served as a rite of passage for young American men.[34] Service in the military, especially during time of war, has been culturally understood as a commonly accepted method for attainment of manhood and proving one's masculinity. War, as one of the most gendered activities known to mankind, serves as a test of masculinity.[35] Indeed, one of the reasons men volunteer to go to war is to establish that they are "real men."[36] Stories of men's heroic exploits in war further serve to perpetuate the national myth of the connection between war service and masculinity.

Some historians cite the need to bolster American manhood and build character through aggressive international policies as a few of the unconscious justifications for the Spanish-American War.[37] To some degree, going to war with another nation can be seen as an attempt to masculinize the nation or the nation's men.[38] The birth of the United

---

[33] Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), xv.

[34] Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory* (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 36.

[35] Eberwein, *Armed Forces*, 5.

[36] Ibid., 6.

[37] Hoganson, 8.

[38] Reeser, 173.

States as a nation coincides with the birth of its military; in fact, the Revolutionary Army and local militias enabled the country to attain its independence from Britain. It is in a nation's interest to provide compelling reasons beyond patriotism to encourage young men to serve in the military and go to war, especially in support of unpopular wars like the Vietnam War. Participation in war then becomes not only part of the national myth, but also part of the myth of manhood.

Focusing on the structural relations between gender and war shows them to be so intimately connected that that connection is more stable across culture and time than are either gender and war independently.[39] As diverse an enterprise as war is, gender outside of war is equally, if not more diverse. A seemingly stable military masculinity contradicts this observation. In his seminal text *War and Gender*, Joshua Goldstein contended that killing does not come naturally to either gender.[40] Due to the possibility of war, cultures unconsciously develop gender roles that will encourage men to fight, and to fight well to ensure the survival of the nation. Tying achievement of manhood to military service and the experience of war cements this relationship between war and gender. This universal selection of men as combatants has shaped the war system, and the prevalence of war throughout history has profoundly influenced gender and gender relations.[41]

As a cultural construction, masculinity is always in a state of fluctuation; war highlights this instability. An early example of the fragility of masculinity is the crisis of

---

[39] Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 38.

masculinity during the late nineteenth century. During this period, a great deal of public discussion centered on the roles of men and women. Men were thought to be best matched to roles in the public sphere, including politics and employment. Women, on the other hand, were considered to be naturally suited for roles within the confines of the home and focused on the family—the "private sphere."[42] In the political realm of their public sphere, men experienced considerable anxiety due to the budding women's suffrage movement along with the dwindling number of Civil War veterans. By winning the right to vote in several states and becoming active in politics and reform movements, women were decidedly stepping into the man's public sphere. Men feared that U.S. politics would devolve into weakness due to the loss of these masculine Civil War soldiers, whom best exemplified the civic virtue required of a democracy.[43] Additionally, the depression of 1893 led to fears of male dependency due to unemployment.[44] Collectively, these cultural events increased anxieties about American manhood and may have been a contributing factor to go to war in order to boost masculinity.

The reflection of this crisis can be seen in the early Spanish-American War films that depicted "aggressive masculinity" supporting the war.[45] While it may be coincidental that the very first war films began in a gendered context during a period of crisis, and valorized masculinity at a time of war, the crisis of masculinity is consistent in American

---

[42] Hoganson, 3.

[43] Ibid., 10.

[44] Ibid., 11.

[45] Eberwein, *Armed Forces*, 6.

cultural history.[46] Film's depiction of war and treatment of cultural turmoil matured over time from documentary and reenactment style films to the more nuanced "narrative" war film, which have been called "the richest texts of masculinity."[47] The plot typically follows the format of boy leaves home, proves himself in combat, wins war, and returns home to claim his bride and win the respect of father-figures.[48] World War II films often followed this format.

Similar to the late nineteenth century, the period of the 1960s and 1970s experienced significant cultural upheaval suggesting a time of crisis for American men with corresponding heightened anxieties about masculinity.[49] This anxiety extended into the 1980s with the ambiguous outcome of the Vietnam War and continued societal instability. Vietnam War films capture this continuous crisis of masculinity and depict the 1980s' national perception of the state of manhood in America. In war films, the nation's virility is often represented by the trials of American soldiers. National self-esteem appears to rely upon military prowess.[50] In World War II, the outcome of the war supported the construction of American masculinity and journey to manhood portrayed in the films, and solidified the myth of the heroic soldier. Vietnam, as a war experience and

---

[46] Eberwein, *Armed Forces*, 6.

[47] Goldstein, 279.

[48] Ibid., 279.

[49] Brenda M. Boyle, *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2009), 1.

[50] Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, "Vietnam and the New Militarism," in *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, ed. J. David Slocum (New York: Routledge, 2006), 239.

war film, failed to repeat this same pattern; the myths of Vietnam as another frontier, the World War II war hero, war service as a path to manhood, and a monolithic American masculinity were exposed.

From the very beginning of World War II, war films played an integral role in mobilizing public support for entrance into hostilities and motivating young American men to fight for their country. Early World War II films were largely a government initiative to bolster national support for America's entrance into hostilities.[51] These films often served as propaganda to support the war or celebrated American victory.[52] Indeed, all major combatants of World War II (the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the Soviet Union) produced propaganda films to unite and mobilize citizens in their respective countries.[53] In fact, the U.S. government studied Nazi propaganda to learn how to produce its own effective and influential material.[54] The War Department recruited and worked with Hollywood directors to create dramatic war documentaries to increase the film audiences' emotional connection to the war.[55]

---

[51] Thomas Schatz, "World War II and the Hollywood 'War Film,'" in *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, ed. J. David Slocum (New York: Routledge, 2006), 147.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Chapman, 62.

[54] John C. Rowe and Richard Berg, *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University, 1991), 96.

[55] Ibid., 95.

In total, approximately 400 World War II films were produced between 1939 and 1945.[56] World War II was the first truly cinematic war. From the beginning, the government, the War Department, and the film industry collaborated to produce a barrage of images in the form of newsreels, documentaries, and feature films to promote the war and rally Americans to the cause.[57] The modern war film was born out of this era and provided the action and spectacle moviegoers demanded while legitimizing U.S. involvement.[58]

The extensive production and popularity of war films suggests the American public connected with the films. The national unity against fascism helped enable this connection as films produced images and values that Americans already supported.[59] The estimated weekly movie attendance of eighty million Americans represented the highest attendance in the history of film.[60] The immediate connection between World War II films and the American public is similar to the connection of Spanish-American War films with audiences. War films were a key way to mobilize the American public because the expansion of the film industry made movie theaters into hubs of news and entertainment.[61] The intended audience for these films was both civilians and

---

[56] Frank J. Wetta and Stephen J. Curley, *Celluloid Wars: A Guide to Film and the American Experience of War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 124.

[57] Chambers and Culbert, 4.

[58] Chapman, 62.

[59] Rowe and Berg, 95.

[60] Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, 20.

[61] Chambers and Culbert, 4.

combatants, civilians at home and combatants overseas.[62] Key messages in many of the films showed young men what American heroism and masculinity looked like.

Wartime World War II films took the same form as Spanish-American War films with documentaries, reenactments, and narratives as the main types of films produced.[63] The Pearl Harbor attack spawned a subgenre in the form of the "retaliation" film, which served to motivate the public to support the war and satisfy the need for cinematic revenge against the Japanese.[64] The narrative film and its ability to trace the life of an individual over the course of the war became a popular genre. Significantly, another popular theme was the depiction of the "melting pot" military unit comprised of American men from diverse backgrounds.[65] Typically, this would be a prime opportunity to highlight differences with the various men in order to define a dominant masculinity. However, the films portrayed these men coming together in a time of crisis as an effective fighting force to achieve the goals of the nation. A prevalent theme was that their unity was key to victory. In the midst of many themes in the World War II film canon, the depiction of World War II as a good war is dominant. Young American men saw this message before they left for war and returned still believing it.[66]

---

[62] Chambers and Culbert, 4.

[63] Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, 10, 21.

[64] Ibid., 83.

[65] J. David Slocum, ed., *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 9.

[66] Chambers and Culbert, 148.

With the end of hostilities, World War II films were less constrained to the patriotic themes required of the war years and were able to produce more introspective representations of the war.[67] Filmmakers took a more critical stance in war films following 1945, providing representations that sought to evaluate the war experience both at home and on the front lines.[68] Although different in content, post-World War II films still captured the imagination of Americans with more than 300 films produced from 1946 to 1992 (source text was published in 1992 and does not count films produced thereafter).[69] These post-war films covered potentially divisive topics such as leadership and authority during the war.[70] Several films focused on veterans' readjustment issues, including the popular film *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946).[71] This film traced the readjustment experience of three very different veterans. The veterans' struggle with reintegration, especially with physical disability and employment is clearly portrayed. Significantly, the women in the film bear the responsibility of resolving the anxiety these veterans experience upon returning from war and readjusting to society. The underlying message that masculine recovery from war was only possible through women contrasts with the depiction of Vietnam War veterans' reintegration into society, reflecting the

---

[67] Wetta and Curley, 158.

[68] Chambers and Culbert, 4.

[69] Wetta and Curley, 159-183.

[70] Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, 23.

[71] Ibid., 22.

19

different gender relations of the two periods.[72] Vietnam War films break from the World

War II conventions in other ways including release date relative to the war, the number of

films made, the purpose, and themes.

Some key differences in the themes portrayed in Vietnam War films compared to

World War II films relate both to the war experience (including training and preparation

for combat) and the return home. While following the typical war narrative structure, *Full

Metal Jacket*, in particular, presented an indictment against the training American men

received to prepare for war. Vietnam War films also tended to focus on the individual

soldier experience. Unlike World War II films, the individual soldier did not find unity

with his fellow soldiers and often his battles were fought with them rather than the

enemy.[73] The struggles the Vietnam veteran faced upon returning home were often

emotional or mental, rather than physical, disabilities.[74] Finally, women no longer played

a role in assisting the veteran upon his return home, and were portrayed as making the

transition more difficult.[75] This phenomenon is in itself is worthy of a separate study.

Like World War II, the Vietnam War was a war that also left an indelible mark on

an entire generation of Americans, but for very different reasons. The war marked the

first time the U.S. military and nation as a whole suffered a defeat.

---

[72] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 162.

[73] Chapman, 164.

[74] Boyle, 103.

[75] *Born on the Fourth of July* shows the disabled main character's father taking care of him, and the estrangement of his high school sweetheart upon his return from Vietnam. In *Hamburger Hill*, women greeted one soldier who was medically evacuated from Vietnam with bags of dog shit.

In contrast to World War II, plot-driven war films did not accompany American entrance into Vietnam. One of the primary purposes of the propaganda war films for both World War II and Vietnam was to educate.[76] However, the audience for the propaganda-type war films that were made during Vietnam was exclusively service members. This was unlike the World War II films, which were shown to both troops and civilians.[77] The U.S. Army created the "troop information" program in 1942 to reinforce patriotism, which was retained through the Cold War with the goal of "instilling political knowledge and opinions."[78] These efforts were largely seen as a failure. The concept of propaganda had also attained a negative connotation with the American public between World War II and Vietnam, perhaps due to the increasing public cynicism about official rhetoric and general distrust of authority.[79]

Changes in technology meant that the television superseded the local movie theater as Americans' primary source of news.[80] Between 1963 and 1968, the number of movie theaters declined from 10,300 to 9,700 and the weekly attendance at them dropped from twenty-two million to nineteen million (compared to eighty million at the height of World War II).[81] The Defense Department had a much tougher time selling the Vietnam

---

[76] Rowe and Berg, 96.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Chris Derosa, *Political Indoctrination in the U.S. Army from World War II to the Vietnam War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 2009), 50.

[79] Rowe and Berg, 96.

[80] Ibid., 97.

[81] Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 122.

War and did not have the collaboration of Hollywood.[82] Over the period 1964 to 1991, only fifty-two Vietnam War films were released; this pales in comparison to more than 700 World War II films released from 1939 to 1992.[83]

The only Vietnam War film released during the conflict was the John Wayne-directed *The Green Berets* (1968), a patriotic attempt in the mold of World War II films combined with Western mythology. John Wayne was the force behind the creation of this film; he bought the rights to the 1965 novel, arranged financing, and assumed the role of director.[84] He also received extensive support from the Department of Defense in the form of technical advisors, military equipment, extras, and location—the film was even shot at Fort Benning, Georgia, the home of the Infantry.[85] However, the film was entirely out of touch with the American public's sentiments and fell flat with critics and the American public alike.[86]

A commonly accepted reason why Hollywood failed to release Vietnam War films during the conflict was the lack of potential audiences, and thus, profitability, due to the American public's ambivalence toward the war.[87] Unlike World War II, there was no end in sight to the war and the outcome was equally ambiguous. The film industry

---

[82] Rowe and Berg, 95.

[83] Wetta and Curley, 197-202.

[84] Ibid., 16.

[85] Ibid., 17.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Michael Lee Lanning, *Vietnam at the Movies* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994), 46.

itself had also transformed in the period between wars, becoming increasingly profit-driven.[88]

When Vietnam War films began to be released in the late 1970s, the films were consistently critical of the war. This first wave of films, such as *Coming Home* (1978), focused on the veteran's return from war and introduced the genre's first epics, *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979).[89] Both *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* depict aspects associated with the mythology of frontier masculinity, including the individualistic hunter-warrior and a journey into the wild. These films generated mass interest in the war and began the boom of films that were released in the 1980s.

The second phase of films released during the early 1980s were considered "revisionist" or "extraction" films that showed an individual Vietnam War veteran returning to Vietnam to "win" the war or liberate American prisoners of war.[90] Blame for the war's failure was shifted from the veteran to the U.S. government. These films include the *Rambo* (1982, 1985, 1988) and *Missing in Action* (1984, 1985, 1988) series.[91] Two common themes among these films were hypermasculinity in the form of extreme individualism and muscular bodies and a return to the site of loss—Vietnam—to re-envision history.[92] These films attempted to recreate the myths—that were destroyed in Vietnam—of war service and heroism as a viable expression of masculinity.

---

[88] Palmer, xiii.

[89] Ibid., 22.

[90] Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, 93.

[91] Palmer, 22.

[92] Wetta and Curley, 4.

Finally, the third phase of films released in the mid-to-late 1980s showed a more realistic attempt to depict the war through the combat experience. These films, such as *Platoon* and *Hamburger Hill*, portray the confusion of combat and meaningless loss American soldiers felt.[93] The films critique key aspects of the myth of war service and masculinity, revealing the false myths perpetuated by World War II: the American war hero, war service as a rite of passage to manhood, and a dominant American masculinity.

Platoon (1986) is based on the autobiographical experiences of Director Oliver Stone. Stone dropped out of Yale in 1965 and volunteered to serve in the infantry in Vietnam.[94] Stone claimed, "It was a way of announcing to my father that I was a man," and later said, "I believed in the John Wayne image of America."[95] *Platoon* portrayed a grunt's eye view of the war and the experiences of one platoon through the young main character Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen). Taylor was a white upper middle-class kid who dropped out of college to learn something from war; he accepted his duty to fight regardless of his privileged socioeconomic status. Taylor narrates various sequences in the film, often through letters to his grandmother. The beginning of the film opens with Taylor's struggle to acclimatize to the war experience. Fear and confusion characterizes his transition from green new soldier to battle-hardened veteran. He is faced with the dilemma of choosing between two father figures in his platoon: Sergeant Barnes (Tom Berenger)—leader of the aggressive, hard-drinking, and country "juicers"—and Sergeant

---

[93] Palmer, 22.

[94] Jeremy M. Devine, *Vietnam at 24 frames a Second: A Critical and Thematic Analysis of Over 400 Films About the Vietnam War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995), 241.

[95] Ibid.

Elias (Willem Dafoe)—leader of the inclusive and pot-smoking "heads."[96] *Platoon* was

the third highest grossing film of 1986 and it won four Oscars including the awards for

Best Director and Best Picture.[97]

Director Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) is based in part on Gustav

Hasford's novel *The Short Timers* (1979).[98] Kubrick had previously directed two other

well-known war films: *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and *Paths of Glory* (1975).[99] Vietnam

War correspondent and author of the famous book on his experience, *Dispatches* (1977),

Michael Herr collaborated with Kubrick and Hasford to write the screenplay for *Full

Metal Jacket*.[100] Both authors alluded to the "mythic tracks" that led the United States

into Vietnam, which took the form of John Wayne references in the film.[101] Kubrick's

depiction of the molding of America's young men into killers follows a recruit from basic

training to his assignment as a military war correspondent in Saigon. The character

(Matthew Modine) carries the nickname "Joker," which was given to him at Parris Island

by his Drill Instructor (R. Lee Ermey).[102] Kubrick constructs Joker as a contradiction: he

---

[96] *Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone (Orion Pictures Corporation, 1986), Blu-Ray (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, 2011).

[97] Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, 96.

[98] Devine, 258.

[99] Albert Auster and Leonard Quart, *How the War was Remembered: Hollywood and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 142.

[100] Devine, 258.

[101] Ibid.

[102] *Platoon*.

has inscribed "Born to Kill" on his helmet, yet he wears a peace symbol on his vest.[103]

He is assigned the job of journalist—an interpreter of war—as an educated white male.

The importance of his role as a cipher of the war experience is depicted in several

sequences in the film when he provides narration, like Taylor in *Platoon*. That these main

characters were both participants in the war and narrators of the experience is important

because it shows that the destruction of myths in Vietnam affected these types of men

(white, middle-class, and educated) the most. *Full Metal Jacket* is, in a sense, two

separate films. The first part portrays the military indoctrination process of Marine boot

camp at Parris Island. The second part focuses on the experience of a Marine unit fighting

in the city of Hue during the Tet Offensive. The film received several Academy Award

nominations.[104]

Director John Irvin's film *Hamburger Hill* (1987) differs from *Full Metal Jacket*

and *Platoon* because it is based on real events during the war. It is a fictional account of a

battle that took place in May 1969 at the base of Dong Ap Bia, Hill 937.[105] The film

depicts in a documentary-like style the experience of a squad of soldiers in the 101st

Airborne Division who were ordered to make eleven assaults of the hill over ten days

only to have the hill abandoned later on in the war.[106] The squad consists of fourteen

young men from diverse class and racial backgrounds and most closely resembles the

---

[103] *Platoon*.

[104] Devine, 262.

[105] Palmer, 48.

[106] Lanning, 240.

"melting pot" style of World War II films.[107] The film's strength is its ability to evoke the visceral experience of combat, the sights of fellow soldiers being wounded, and the sound of machine gun fire and artillery.[108] Unlike the other films in this study, there is no main character.

Casualties of War (1989) is based on Daniel Lang's 1969 account of a rape and murder in Vietnam that was published in the *New Yorker*.[109] David Rabe, who served in Vietnam, wrote the script and Brian DePalma directed the film.[110] The film's main character is Private Eriksson (Michael J. Fox), a young married man who seems grounded and educated compared to the other soldiers in his squad. The film follows his squad's atrocious act of kidnapping and raping a young Vietnamese woman. Eriksson has a tenuous relationship with "Sarge" (Sean Penn), the gruff twenty-year-old squad leader of the group.[111] Sarge is the most experienced soldier in the squad, despite his young age, and has considerable influence over the other soldiers. He saves Eriksson's life at the beginning of the film, but is also the mastermind behind the plan to kidnap and rape the Vietnamese woman. Of the men in the squad, Eriksson is the only man to object to the rape. The film explicitly explores sexual metaphors of violence and masculinity. Like

---

[107] Jarvis, 122.

[108] Auster and Quart, 146.

[109] Devine, 299.

[110] Eberwein, *Armed Forces*, 129.

[111] *Casualties of War*, directed by Brian DePalma (Columbia Pictures, 1989), DVD (Sony 2006).

Taylor, Eriksson faced a moral dilemma that defines his combat experience. *Casualties of War* was the top Vietnam War film at the box office in 1989.[112]

Also released in 1989, *Born on the Fourth of July* is based on the autobiography of the same name of Vietnam War veteran Ron Kovic published in 1976.[113] Oliver Stone also directed this film, which is based on Ron Kovic's (Tom Cruise) Vietnam War experience. The story traces Kovic's initial excitement and passion for going to war with his later disenchantment and anti-war activism. The film is steeped in the myths of war service and achievement of manhood. It opens with a ten-year-old Kovic playing war with his friends in the woods.[114] The film then shows a high-school age Kovic listening to Marine recruiters speak at his high school. Seeing war service as a shortcut to manhood, he patriotically enlists. The film depicts his second tour in Vietnam, during which he is wounded in combat and becomes paralyzed from the waist down. After recovering from his wounds, Kovic returns home where he struggles to reintegrate into society as a veteran and accept his status as a paraplegic. Ironically, the war destroyed the possibility for the achievement of manhood that had in part prompted Kovic to volunteer. His masculinity in the form of his sexuality and physical manhood were permanently damaged. The film was nominated for eight Academy Awards and won two, Best Editor and Best Director, Stone's second Oscar.[115]

---

[112] Devine, 304.

[113] Devine, 305.

[114] Ibid., 307.

[115] Ibid., 314.

CHAPTER 3

NARRATIVE HISTORY OF AMERICAN MASCULINITY

> Putting manhood in historical context presents it differently, as a
> constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our
> relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world . . . Manhood
> does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created
> in our culture. In fact, the search for a transcendent, timeless definition of
> manhood itself is a sociological phenomenon—we tend to search for the timeless
> and eternal during moments of crisis, those points of transition when the old
> definitions no longer work and new definitions are yet to be firmly established.
> —Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*

American men's pursuit of manhood—the attempt to prove and demonstrate

masculinity—is a lifelong endeavor.[116] What role has masculinity played—specifically in

proving or testing manhood—in the frontiers the United States tamed and the wars it

waged?[117] In this study, 'masculinity' is used to refer to the images, values, and

behaviors deemed central to the attainment of male adulthood in American culture.[118]

'Manhood' is used to describe the successful achievement of male adulthood.[119] This

study uses feminist scholar Judith Butler's argument that gender is socially constructed

and masculinity is performative.[120] The construction of masculinity is a process that

---

[116] Kimmel, 3.

[117] Ibid., 2.

[118] Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, xii.

[119] Kimmel, 3.

[120] See Judith Butler's ground breaking texts *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2006) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (2011) for an in-depth discussion regarding the social construction of gender and performance of masculinity.

functions through the reiteration of gender norms.[121] Masculinity norms used to analyze

the films in chapter four are: becoming a man, relationships, definition by others, and the

physical body. The very fact that the process requires repetition suggests it is never quite

complete.[122] This performance is not conscious; men are not working from a "cultural

script."[123] Social interactions create masculinity within culture; masculinity is not the

materialization of an inner essence.[124] Images and myths of masculinity play important

roles in the construction process. Images can become myths when they become so

pervasive in culture that they are taken for granted.[125] For instance, as American cultural

icons, the cowboy and the World War II hero represented ideals of masculinity that were

so popular and appealing that they became American myths.[126] Images and myths both

enable the perpetuation of a monolithic masculinity that seems eternal and unchanging.[127]

Representations of masculinity in film serve a dual purpose: they reveal forms of

---

[121] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2011), xix.

[122] Ibid., xii.

[123] Reeser, 81.

[124] Kimmel, 4.

[125] Reeser, 23.

[126] Reeser, 23. See Jarvis' text *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War* II for expanded discussion on the use of images and creation of masculine ideals during this time period.

[127] Reeser, 22.

masculinity present in culture while simultaneously playing a part in the construction of the masculinity that they portray.[128]

As a social construction, masculinity exists only relative to the structure of gender relations as a whole.[129] Masculinity is present at all levels in American society and plays a key role in the social structure of gender relations.[130] Understanding gender's role in structuring social practice requires an appreciation for how it interacts with other aspects of social structure including race and class.[131] White men's masculinity, for example, is often defined in opposition to not only women, but black men as well.[132] Masculinity is amorphous and plural; there is no one static definition of masculinity across time. Age, race, class, sexuality, time, and geographic location all play roles in defining masculinity for American men.[133] Despite masculinity's plurality, American men still have to compete with and try to measure up to an ideal model of masculinity.[134] Therefore, a history of American masculinity must not only trace the evolving "ideal" masculinity, but also the competing versions that exist alongside it.[135]

---

[128] Reeser, 25.

[129] Connell, 185.

[130] Ibid., 76.

[131] Ibid., 75.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Kimmel, 4.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid., 2.

Attempts to define a stable version of masculinity at various points in time can be seen as responses to its inherent instability, exposing cultural anxiety regarding contradictions in masculinity.[136] These moments of "crisis in masculinity" often accompany moments of crisis in other arenas, such as political, economic, and social life.[137] These crisis points especially capture moments when men's relationship with their work and families were transformed.[138] Masculinity shifts for many reasons in society, but wars seem to be particularly relevant points in time for shifts in masculinity. The immense social change and the Vietnam War during the 1960s and 1970s was one such crisis period that was followed by attempts to restore a dominant masculinity in the 1980s.

Masculinity theorist, R. W. Connell, argued that while the reasons behind changes in masculinity are complex, there are three main reasons: the relationship to centers of power in a nation, economic participation and accumulation, and women's challenge to gender relations.[139] Feminism, in particular, is an example of a phenomenon that provoked a crisis of masculinity in the 1960s and 1970s.[140]

To understand masculinity in a certain period and place is to understand the history of changes in political, economic, and social life. The narrative of masculinity presented here charts a fifty-year period, starting with the Great Depression until the

---

[136] Reeser, 40.

[137] Kimmel, 7.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Connell, 191.

[140] Reeser, 28.

1980s. Analysis of this period in American history adds context to the shifts in masculinity and the interaction of other societal elements that contribute to the changes. Beginning with the Great Depression in 1929 provides context to the changes in masculinity over time, especially in comparison to the shifts associated with World War II and the Vietnam War. The changes during the two periods are not the same, but they reveal that the only consistency associated with masculinity in American history is that it always has been in a constant state of crisis.

The Vietnam War films analyzed in this study reveal these anxieties about masculinity. Specifically, the films reflect anxieties associated with 1980s political, economic, and social shifts. Both national myths and norms of masculinity that are specific to the 1980s are exposed. The films disclose that Vietnam as a new frontier to tame and the path to manhood model of World War II failed young American men who served in the Vietnam War. The performance of masculinity in the films reveals a crisis, and exposes norms of masculinity. The masculinity categories of analysis for the films in chapter 4 are: the path to manhood, male bonding, defining by others, and physical performance.

The Great Depression greatly affected gender relations and masculinity norms. The stock market crash of 1929 rocked industrial production, family savings, and employment.[141] Industrial production fell by more than 50 percent and more than nine million families lost their savings in bank failures.[142] During the three-year period

---

[141] Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 218.

[142] Ibid.

following the stock market crash, unemployment rose from 16 percent to almost 20

percent.[143] With many men having lost their jobs or unable to find steady work, family

dynamics shifted as women increasingly had to take jobs to help support the family.

Between 1900 and the mid-1930s, the percentage of women employed in the workforce

rose from less than 6 percent to more than 15 percent.[144] Although women entered the

workforce in greater numbers than previously in American history, their presence was

reflective of a need for family survival rather than increased acceptance and expansion of

gender roles. Federal and state legislation passed during this period attempted to curtail

the number of working married women, including the U.S. Economy Act of 1932,

prohibiting the government from hiring two members of the same family.[145]

Another effect of the Great Depression, especially in terms of competition in the

workforce, was an increase in nativism and racism as men attempted to differentiate

themselves and establish their manhood. Immigrants and non-white American men were

portrayed as opposites of white American men in an attempt to bolster white men's

masculinity. Gender, nativism, and racism intersected for depicting "them" as less

intelligent and less manly.[146]

The effects of men losing their economic identity and the introduction of married

women into the workplace were massive. For men, this often meant not only losing their

---

[143] Kimmel, 140.

[144] Coontz, 218.

[145] Ibid., 219.

[146] Kimmel, 141.

place as the prime breadwinner, but also their identity and purpose.[147] Thus, the crisis of masculinity in the 1930s concerned the two prime roles for men in society, that of worker and father. A job and the ability to provide for a family were hallmarks of manhood. With nearly one in four men out of work, the Great Depression eroded this model.[148] According to Kimmel, "Never before had American men experienced such a massive and system-wide shock to their ability to prove manhood by providing for their families."[149] Men's loss of economic security combined with their wives working to help support the family threatened contemporary ideas of masculinity and marriage that most men had embraced.[150] Men lost their status with their wives and their families. In an attempt to find purpose, men turned increasingly to their sons in order to establish their manhood.[151] This phenomenon is seen again in the 1950s.

In response to the economic crisis and in acknowledgment of the resulting negative social implications, President Franklin Roosevelt pushed forward his New Deal programs to help restore economic and social stability in 1933.[152] The Civil Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, and Civilian Conservation Corps put nearly fifteen million Americans back to work.[153] The Civilian Conservation Corps only

---

[147] Coontz, 219.

[148] Kimmel, 141.

[149] Ibid., 140.

[150] Coontz, 219.

[151] Kimmel, 146.

[152] Jarvis, 20.

[153] Ibid.

hired young men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five and was created specifically to serve as a "man-building" agency.[154] These and other New Deal programs helped alleviate some of the pressures of the Great Depression and the crisis of masculinity; however, it was America's entrance into World War II that restored models of traditional manhood in American society.

All told, 12,209,238 American servicemen served in the war from 1939 to 1945 with 1,078,594 total casualties.[155] To say that the war had an enormous effect on every aspect of American culture is an understatement. Approximately two-thirds of American men aged eighteen to thirty-four served in the armed forces during the war.[156] For the World War II generation, and especially for the men who served, the war was the defining experience of their lives. While widespread unemployment challenged the breadwinner model of masculinity during the Depression, World War II reaffirmed American masculinity in several ways.[157] First, the war put American men back to work and jumpstarted the nation's economic recovery from the Great Depression. Second, the uncontestable victory announced the United States as a world power and the dominant performance reasserted American masculinity militarily. However, World War II also

---

[154] Jarvis, 21.

[155] The National WWII Museum, "By the Numbers: The U.S. Military: U.S. Military Personnel (1939-1945)," accessed February 27, 2015, http://www.national ww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/ww2-by-the-numbers/us-military.html.

[156] Jarvis, 5.

[157] Ibid., 16.

served as an important catalyst for shifts in national perspectives of masculinity and gender norms from the Great Depression era.

World War II provided American men with ways to reclaim manhood that was degraded during the Great Depression. The war opened up two traditional paths to manhood for American men: employment and military service. Men were able to recover their centrality in the family as providers and their dominance within society by proving their masculinity in battle.[158] Battlefield heroism provided desperately needed masculine role models for a younger generation of American men to aspire to which were reinforced in society through media in the form of World War II and Western films.[159] Even for those men who served in support roles during the war, they were able to achieve manhood through the traditionally accepted path of war service. The war also provided opportunities for working-class and minority men to increase their status within society because of their service in the military or stable employment due to the wartime economy.[160] However, these men's success and upward mobility in society led to questions about what would happen to them after the war, foreshadowing class and race issues in the 1950s.[161]

Mobilization for World War II required a dramatic increase in the industrial production to provide war materiel, which also required an expansion of the workforce.

---

[158] Kimmel, 161.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Mike Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America: Masculinity, Family, and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir* (London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 29.

[161] Ibid.

The number of men not directly involved in the war effort were not able to meet this demand and women—especially married women—entered the workforce in large numbers for the first time. During the war, the number of women in the workforce compared to the Great Depression increased by almost 60 percent, of which 70 percent were married.[162] A key difference between working women during the Great Depression and World War II is that the latter were encouraged to gain employment in order to support the war effort. The war provided women with unprecedented economic opportunities and diverse types of employment, including service in the military. Although the percentage of women in the military was capped at 2 percent, more than 350,000 women enlisted in the Woman's Army Corps.[163] Manpower requirements to conduct the war trumped the need to uphold traditional gender roles and patriotism justified the expansion of women in the workforce.

The war also provided unprecedented opportunities for women outside of their traditional private sphere of the home. Employment not only offered women an income to help support their families, but also the satisfaction of individual work outside of the home.[164] Women who were already participating in the workforce prior to the war enjoyed increased options for choices in terms of employment and wages. By temporarily shifting boundaries and expectations of women in the economy, World War II disrupted gender relations, which would have lasting effects throughout the twentieth century.

---

[162] Coontz, 221.

[163] Ibid., 161.

[164] Chambers and Culbert, 113.

The years following World War II are often depicted as quiet, idyllic, and family-centered. This image of American life in the 1950s reveals a yearning to return to traditional gender roles and patriotic ideals while hiding the cultural turmoil and anxiety that was boiling beneath the surface of American society. Fears associated with the reintegration of millions of returning servicemen, social unrest, and the beginning of the Cold War with the Soviet Union permeate this decade. American men returned from the war with the expectation of a return to normal. For women and minorities, whose experiences during the war years expanded their status within society and their sense of possibility, returning to pre-war roles was not met with the same enthusiasm. American manhood historian, Michael Kimmel, described this decade as a period of "containment," when "ideas of normality were enforced with a desperate passion."[165]

Returning service members made their way back to the United States on slow moving troop transport ships, which provided them time for decompression from the stress of the battlefield and reflection on their experiences.[166] While these troops were likely contemplating what their return would entail, American society also questioned their reintegration. Perceptions of history suggest this reintegration was smoother than it actually was. Society's anxiety with returning service men came from concerns about their ability to cope with their war experiences, the effects of their reentry into the workforce, and the status of masculine identity after the certainty of military service.[167] Military service in World War II provided men with a clear sense of masculine

---

[165] Kimmel, 170.

[166] Auster and Quart, 78.

[167] Chopra-Gant, 95-96.

identity.[168] There were concerns regarding where these men would find their identities in the less-structured postwar civilian life.

World War II veterans experienced trauma from the war in the form of nightmares, mood swings, and lethargy.[169] Veterans were encouraged to "learn to live with it," which explains similar exaltations to veterans returning from the Vietnam War decades later.[170] Easing the transition of veterans fell on the shoulders of women, who were encouraged to return to the private sphere of the home.[171] Films made after the war, such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), portrayed this struggle with reintegration and women's key role in the healing process. Kimmel argued that only through women's supportive efforts "was masculine recovery and repatriation possible for those returning vets."[172] Specifically, disabled veterans who experienced the loss of their physical expression of masculinity, required women to serve as agents to rebuild their masculinity.[173]

Coupled with society's anxiety about veterans returning and coping with the transition from a violent war environment to the peaceful home front, was the fear about their return to the workforce. As it turned out, the returning veterans did not have a negative impact on the economy, but concerns persisted regarding the role of women in

---

[168] Chopra-Gant, 96.

[169] Kimmel, 162.

[170] Ibid., 163.

[171] Ibid., 162.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Boyle, 102.

the workforce. Experts were concerned with not only women in the workforce, but the broader American values of family and home. How would women's wartime experiences affect their attitude towards earning a living and thus their relationships with husbands, family, and ultimately, the home?[174] Marriage historian, Stephanie Coontz, contended that in the early 1950s "women seemed happy to leave their wartime experiences behind and embrace their role as homemakers and mothers."[175] Indeed, the decade spawned a marriage boom with 95 percent of all persons marrying at unprecedented younger ages— almost half of American women married by the time they turned nineteen in 1959.[176]

With the home front secure, men returned to the workforce, but to what types of jobs were they returning? World War II not only rescued the American economy from the Great Depression, but also opened the way for more families to gain middle-class status. Nearly 60 percent of families attained middle-class incomes by the mid-1950s.[177] Millions of new homes were built to accommodate these new middle-class families.[178] Higher incomes also meant more discretionary income for modern conveniences that the post-war economy was more than capable of producing. This middle-class status was linked to new types of work that came out of the transformed economy—white-collar work. The most well known stereotype exposing the malaise of the 1950s male worker is the image of "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" from Sloan Wilson's novel of the same

---

[174] Chambers and Culbert, 108.

[175] Coontz, 225.

[176] Ibid., 225-226.

[177] Ibid., 231.

[178] Ibid., 230.

name published in 1955.[179] American men struggled not to lose their individual identity in a corporate machine created by modern capitalism that was marked by conformity and hierarchy.[180] The masculinity crisis in the 1950s for American men was closely tied to the changes in their roles as workers. Wage work and working for others was seen as less masculine than the independent and entrepreneurial work of their fathers and grandfathers.[181] The rise of suburban sprawl also served to reinforce this sense of uniformity.[182] Unable to carve out a distinct identity within the workplace, men increasingly sought out their roles as husbands, and especially fathers, to express their masculine identity.

Following World War II and the difficulties some men experienced reintegrating and coping with their experiences, one arena provided the possibility of achieving normality and securing masculine identities—the family and fatherhood. During the 1950s, the family and home proved instrumental for affirming men's identity and masculinity. Cultural sociologist, Robert Bly, described the "Fifties Male" as one who "got to work early, labored responsibly, supported his wife and children, and admired discipline."[183] In addition to affirming middle-class masculinity, focusing on the family proved crucial to ensuring the development of American sons. One indication of the

---

[179] Kimmel, 174.

[180] Ibid., 173-174.

[181] Miriam G. Reumann, *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2005), 64.

[182] Kimmel, 170.

[183] Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Boston, MA: De Capo Press, 2004), 1.

importance of American men's role in the family was the publication of Dr. Spock's popular *Baby and Child Care* text, which advocated for fathers to play an active role in childrearing in American families.[184] Without proper male role models, Americans feared sons would become homosexual, juvenile delinquents, or communists.[185] Also implicated in the debate over properly raising sons were over dominant mothers, who were seen as contributing to their sons' delinquency and move to gender non-conforming roles.[186] National fears and anxiety of the American public during the 1950s focused internally on domestic issues and externally on communism.

World War II not only spurred changes in gender relations, but race relations as well. Following the war in July 1948, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981 that ended segregation in the armed forces.[187] World War II provided black male soldiers with the opportunity to prove their fighting ability. Domestically, the war hastened discussions of racial injustice. The well-known 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v Board of Education* further provided momentum to the Civil Rights Movement by outlawing racial segregation in schools.[188] The rise of communism after World War II provoked a series of domestic responses including the House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities, which precipitated an investigation into the film

---

[184] Chopra-Gant, 65.

[185] Kimmel, 171.

[186] Ibid., 177.

[187] Adrian R. Lewis, *The American Culture of War: The History of U.S. Military Force From World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 141.

[188] Coyne, 84.

industry in 1947.[189] Senator Joseph McCarthy played on these national fears to launch his

infamous internal offensive against communism and homosexuality in the United

States.[190] In the early 1950s, signaling concerns with communist expansion, the United

States became involved in the Korean War, which ended in a truce in 1953. Competition

with the Soviet Union heated up with the Space Race and two ideological perspectives—

Capitalism vs Communism. The successful Soviet launch of the *Sputnik* space capsule

raised questions about American superiority.[191] Within this context, the United States

increased involvement in another Asian country that would come to dominate

international affairs in the 1960s and 1970s—Vietnam.[192]

 The 1950s were a period when American men negotiated new models of manhood

that focused more on their domestic roles. Women and families proved key to the

reintegration of returning veterans, and the home became the focal point for proving

masculinity in terms of males as providers, heads of household, and fathers. American

manhood historian, Michael Kimmel, argued:

> As the 1950s ended, American men still felt temporary about themselves, even
> more restless in the midst of even greater abundance than Tocqueville ever
> imagined. Responsible breadwinners and devoted fathers, they were still anxious
> about over conformity but unable and unwilling to break free of domestic
> responsibilities to become rebels on the run. Besides, they were needed at home to
> raise their sons to be real men.[193]

---

[189] Chopra-Gant, 27.

[190] Kimmel, 170.

[191] Coyne, 105.

[192] Ibid., 85.

[193] Kimmel, 185.

Tellingly, polls revealed that John Wayne was the most admired male figure during the 1950s, 1960s, and into the early 1970s.[194] He represented a mythic monolithic masculinity that celebrated independence and was in opposition to expectations of American men due to domestic responsibilities. For the 1950s American man, the masculinity crisis was an internal affair. The 1950s foreshadowed the social upheaval that characterized the 1960s and 1970s, and exposed anxieties both domestically about men's place in society, and abroad, regarding America's place in the world.

The 1960s and 1970s were a politically and socially unstable period in the United States. From the assassination of an American president through the resignation-to-avoid-impeachment of another American president, anxiety about the formerly stable institutions of masculine power was evident. The Cold War escalated, which led America to engage in interventionist foreign policy that required the use of force, particularly in Vietnam. In response to escalating involvement in Vietnam—a war that was largely unpopular—an anti-Vietnam movement began, primarily consisting of young American university students. The rise of the Civil Rights movement, the Gay Liberation movement, and modern feminist movement challenged the social status quo. Since masculinity is often defined by opposition, the shifting status and power of these minority groups forced the re-negotiation of American masculinity. During the 1960s and 1970s, American masculinity was characterized by its plurality. The masculinity crisis during this period was internal and external, with American men bombarded on all sides by competing definitions and social debates about what it was to be a man. American men continued to struggle to find their identity within an ever increasingly competitive

---

[194] Ibid., 182.

workforce while the façade of a perfect nuclear family began to crumble. A final insult

for American manhood during this period was the destruction of the myth of the

American war hero for Vietnam veterans. Their military service was tainted by its

connection to a failed war.

American involvement in Vietnam escalated after the 1954 Geneva Conference

that ended the Franco-Vietminh War.[195] The country was divided at the seventeenth

parallel and the United States was determined to help the South remain non-

communist.[196] Part of the reason for this emphasis was the "domino theory," a concern

that once one nation fell to communism in a region, other nations would follow suit, thus

expanding the influence of communism.[197] In the late 1950s, an insurgency—supported

by Ho Chi Minh, leader of the North—began in South Vietnam. The United States began

to commit advisors to help the South combat the insurgency, and by 1963, there were

more than 16,000 American military personnel on ground without a formal declaration of

war.[198]

The election of a young senator from Massachusetts—John F. Kennedy—in 1960

reflected the youthful optimism and hope that permeated the 1950s in America. In his

acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in 1960, Kennedy appealed to

the national myth of the frontier:

---

[195] James H. Willbanks, *Vietnam War: The Essential Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2013), xi.

[196] Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1.

[197] Lewis, 232.

[198] Logevall, 2.

> For I stand tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier. From the lands that stretch three thousand miles behind me, the pioneers of old gave up their safety, their comfort and sometimes their lives to build a new world here in the West . . . Today some would say that those struggles are all over--that all the horizons have been explored--that all the battles have been won-- that there is no longer an American frontier . . . But I trust that no one in this vast assemblage will agree with those sentiments. For the problems are not all solved and the battles are not all won--and we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier--the frontier of the 1960's--a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils-- a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats . . . But I tell you the New Frontier is here, whether we seek it or not. Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus.[199]

This New Frontier would soon include Vietnam, and for tens of thousands of young American men would represent their journey on the path to manhood through wartime service.

Kennedy's presidency immediately experienced the effects of rising tensions with the Soviet Union in the form of the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion of 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.[200] The invasion was a failed attempt to overthrow the communist-led government of Cuba and continued tension between the United States and the Soviet Union later led to the thirteen-day Cuban Missile Crisis.[201] Fear of nuclear war was real for Americans during this crisis.

Kennedy's assassination in 1963 shocked the nation and compounded national fears. American manhood historian, Kimmel argued, "If Kennedy could be shot down,

---

[199] John F. Kennedy Museum and Library, "Excerpt, 1960 Democratic National Convention, 15 July 1960," July 15 1960, accessed March 25, 2015, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/AS08q5oYz0SFUZg9uOi4iw.aspx.

[200] Lewis, 192.

[201] Auster and Quart, 24.

47

then the manhood he embodied was itself vulnerable."[202] Kennedy's successor, Lyndon

B. Johnson, continued the fight against communism and vowed not to become the first

American president to lose a war.[203]

    The event escalating American engagement in Vietnam involves the questionable

circumstances surrounding an attack against the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* in the Gulf of

Tonkin off the central coast of North Vietnam in 1964.[204] Whether the attack was

unprovoked and whether the destroyer was within North Vietnam's territorial waters is

still debated. Regardless, Johnson pressed Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin resolution

shortly after the incident. The resolution authorized the president to take "all necessary

measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent

further aggression" without a formal declaration of war.[205] Vietnam War historian,

Fredrik Logevall explained Johnson's actions regarding the Vietnam War: "What he

really feared was the personal humiliation that he believed would come with failure in

Vietnam. He saw the war as a test of his own manliness."[206] Johnson's own crisis of

masculinity added to the expansion of American involvement in Vietnam and prevented

him from realizing the war was lost.[207] Johnson's successor, President Richard M. Nixon

mirrored Johnson's fears regarding the war in Vietnam. He feared being seen as soft on

---

[202] Kimmel, 193.

[203] Logevall, 392.

[204] Ibid., 196.

[205] Willbanks, *Vietnam War: The Essential Reference Guide*, xv.

[206] Logevall, 393.

[207] Kimmel, 193.

communism; his paranoia eventually led to his political demise when the Watergate scandal was exposed and forced his resignation.[208] From actions such as those described above, emerged a general distrust for authority in the American public.

Socially, American men in the 1960s and 1970s felt pressure from the Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, and the Gay Liberation Movements for recognition and inclusion. The collective movements represented shifts in race and gender relations, ultimately altering the social structure of the United States. Traditional roles were threatened and access to power opened up. These groups, historically excluded from the public sphere and political process, demanded equality and "offered scathing critiques of traditional masculinity."[209] Black Americans, women, and gays insisted upon inclusion and participation in all public arenas such as politics and the economy, thus challenging what had once been preserves of white American males. The problem for American men was that these calls for inclusion were seen as a zero sum game; greater visibility and rights for these "others" was seen as a loss of power for white men.[210] These same minority groups were the others against which American men defined their manhood. If these minorities were allowed the same rights, roles, and access to the same space that was once the bastion of white men, how were white men supposed to define themselves?[211]

---

[208] Ibid., 195.

[209] Ibid., 196.

[210] "Others" includes all non-white, heterosexual men.

[211] Kimmel, 202.

The Civil Rights Movement that began in the 1950s continued throughout the 1960s. Bus boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, marches, and voter registration drives were all actions taken to expand civil rights.[212] Black Americans demanded full citizenship, and black men, specifically, demanded recognition of their stake in American manhood.[213] In June of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous "I have a Dream" speech that outlined black Americans' plea for equal rights.[214] Retaliation against this activism was common and sometimes extremely violent. Race riots swept across the United States between 1965 and 1967.[215] The legacies of this activism were legislative victories including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Bill of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968.[216] Civil Rights legislation provided access to protection and institutional power for minority Americans. This newly acquired power contributed to the masculinity crisis during this period.

In addition to the Civil Rights Movement, young Americans were also involved in a counter-culture movement to effect structural change in the United States.[217] These activists, labeled as a group, the "New Left," were a collection of students, young and

---

[212] Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 178.

[213] Kimmel, 190.

[214] Ibid., 189.

[215] Coyne, 121.

[216] Dittmar and Michaud, 178.

[217] Ibid.

not-so young men and women who were disillusioned with American society.[218] Many of the young men and women involved in this movement were products of the baby boom following World War II and grew up in relative comfort and security in middle class American suburbia.[219] The rhetoric of the Kennedy administration and the moral idealism of the Civil Rights Movement inspired their activism.[220] Some of these young men and women formed the Students for a Democratic Society in the early 1960s, a group that eventually was heavily involved in the Anti-war Movement.[221] The inconsistencies of the Johnson administration, the rising draft calls, and the number of casualties in Vietnam spurred their involvement.[222] Race was part of the anti-war discussion because more blacks than whites were drafted, and comprised a greater percentage of combat troops, at least early in the war.[223] The Counter Culture Movement in a sense represented the revolt of the young against the old, of sons against fathers.[224] The hippies or "flower children" of this generation rejected the 1950s model of manhood that consisted of a nuclear suburban family and corporate invisibility.[225]

---

[218] Auster and Quart, 27.

[219] Kimmel, 190.

[220] Auster and Quart, 27.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid.

[223] Dittmar and Michaud, 178.

[224] Kimmel, 190.

[225] Ibid.

The Gay Liberation Movement also rejected conventions of the 1950s, namely the assumption of heterosexuality and exclusion of gays from recognition of full citizenship. Society's discrimination against gays included job discrimination, imprisonment, and sometimes murder.[226] The purpose of these practices was to draw social boundaries around, and to enforce, acceptable social behavior.[227] Gay men especially posed a threat to heterosexual men. Gay men complicated views of masculinity, thus creating the need to define "real" masculinity against gay men's masculinity.[228] Homophobia was a by-product of this attempt to distance straight men from gay men. The Gay Liberation Movement challenged the argument that homosexuality was a result of failed gender identity.[229] Gay patrons of the Stonewall bar rioted in June of 1969 in response to targeted oppressive police raids.[230] Gay Liberation activists saw a connection in the authoritarian social order that oppressed both gays and women.[231]

The social movements during this period shared the concept of oppression; however, the Women's Liberation Movement focused on the structural position of men in society.[232] Gay theory and feminist theory share the view of masculinity as "linked to

---

[226] Connell, 40.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Ibid.

[229] Kimmel, 190.

[230] Eberwein, *Armed Forces*, 150.

[231] Connell, 40.

[232] Connell, 41.

power, organized for domination, and resistant to change because of power relations."[233]
The term "patriarchy" comes out of this analysis to describe the structured process of
gender discrimination.[234] Betty Friedan's 1963 text *The Feminine Mystique* signaled the
rise of feminism in the United States.[235] The text gave a voice to the private experience of
isolation and unhappiness that many homemakers in America felt, but could not define.
The introduction of the birth control pill and the 1973 *Roe v Wade* Supreme Court ruling
gave women the right of control over their bodies.[236] They gained the ability to choose
whether to procreate and the right to terminate unwanted pregnancies. Feminism allowed
women to gain more autonomy in their personal lives, especially in their relationships
with men, and empowered their participation in the public sphere.[237] Women's increased
participation in the economic and political realms openly challenged male privilege, and
threatened masculinity. Feminism disrupted the entire structure of social relations
including women's representation in the economy, access to power, and relationships
with men.

The Women's Liberation Movement forced some men to analyze their own lives,
especially regarding their work and their relationships with women.[238] The introspection
of these men spawned a Men's Liberation Movement in the mid-1970s. Men's liberation

---

[233] Ibid., 42.

[234] Ibid., 41.

[235] Kimmel, 189.

[236] Ibid., 197.

[237] Ibid.

[238] Ibid., 186.

was part social movement and part self-help program.[239] The movement was an attempt to take critiques of masculinity and their connection to power seriously.[240] In a sense, the movement was a critique of the dominant view of masculinity in society.[241] Kimmel argued, "As a collection of dos and don'ts, the male sex role was a recipe for disaster; given what it took to be a real man, few, if any, men could live up to the image, and hence all men would feel like failures as men."[242] The anonymous corporate identity for middle-class American men continued from the 1950s. A common feeling amongst working men was one of alienation and isolation in the face of relentless competition.[243] They worked in boring corporate jobs and felt trapped in unhappy marriages.[244] Consumerism was a common characteristic of American life in the 1960s that contributed to the feeling of homogeneity. Two-thirds of American families owned homes, three-fourths owned cars, and 87 percent had televisions.[245] Despite a relatively high standard of living, these men, like their female counterparts, were also unfulfilled in life.

Generational discord also characterized the 1960s and 1970s. Young Americans rebelled against authority figures, especially against government and political figures that they saw as responsible for dragging the United States into the Vietnam War. The young

---

[239] Ibid., 202.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Ibid., 203.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Ibid., 191.

[244] Ibid., 202.

[245] Coontz, 231.

men who answered their nation's call to service felt the government and men in positions of power—the fathers of their generation—had lied to them. Their war experience did not live up to the expectations based on the myth with which they had grown up. These young men felt used by these "fathers."[246] Robert Bly's text *Iron John: A Book About Men* explored the supposed decline of American men since the 1950s.[247] He argued that a main reason for this decline was the diminishment of the role of the father.[248] Evolutions in the economy resulted in permanent changes in the family structure and father-son relationship.[249] The daily absence of fathers in the home has led to a lack of "initiation" moments for American boys.[250] These initiation moments were opportunities for boys to learn from their fathers what it means to be a man. Bly contends that the absence of fathers and these moments, contributed to a "father-son-crisis."[251] This crisis contributed to young American's activism and distrust of authority.[252]

In addition to the lack of initiation moments between fathers and sons and distrust in authority, young men had to contend with a fundamental challenge to the notion of war service as a steadfast path to manhood. The murky beginnings of the Vietnam War dragged out into nine years of war with a total of 2,594,000 service members rotating

---

[246] Slocum, 279.

[247] Bly, 35.

[248] Ibid., 102.

[249] Ibid., 19.

[250] Ibid., 15-19.

[251] Bly, 21.

[252] Ibid.

through Vietnam.[253] Of these, more than 58,000 service members were killed and more than 300,000 wounded.[254] Due to improvements in battlefield medical care, more men with traumatic injuries were saved than during World War II. More than 100,000 veterans returned from Vietnam with significant physical disabilities.[255] Unlike World War II, women did not assume the same role in Vietnam veterans' reintegration. This was especially damaging for disabled veterans since they did not have women to help rebuild their masculinity.[256] The circumstances of World War II and Vietnam veterans' experiences were meaningfully different as well. Unconventional warfare, lack of battle lines, and an often indistinguishable enemy all characterized the Vietnam War.[257] Vietnam War soldiers were younger than their World War II counterparts were: nineteen compared to twenty-six years old.[258] These younger men had fewer life experiences to draw on to prepare them to deal with the stresses of combat.[259] The one-year tour policy also resulted in exposing Vietnam War soldiers to higher continuous days of combat, and the rotation out of the most experienced servicemen.[260] The result was a highly stressful environment for new soldiers. The differences in experiences were not restricted to the

---

[253] Lewis, 250.

[254] Auster and Quart, 76.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Boyle, 102.

[257] Auster and Quart, 77.

[258] Ibid.

[259] Ibid.

[260] Ibid.

battlefield. World War II veterans had time on a troopship to decompress prior to returning home. Within as few as twenty-four hours, Vietnam veterans could be home from combat; they had virtually no time for decompression or reflection on their experiences.[261] The lack of fanfare upon their return, the perceived loss of the war, and the less universal experience of war service also complicated the returning veterans' experiences.

The Vietnam War and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s destroyed several important American myths and fundamentally altered gender norms. The myth of Vietnam as a potential New Frontier and the World War II military war hero were exposed as frauds. Norms of masculinity and manhood such as the monolithic 1950s masculinity, and war service as a path to manhood both proved false. Many of the important symbols that Americans, and especially American men, used to construct their identities were altered.[262] One of the most reliable roles for achieving manhood, the soldier, was disrupted because of the Vietnam War.[263] Refusing to talk about Vietnam was a defense mechanism to deal with the loss of the war and men's sense of place within American society.[264]

The legacy of the Vietnam War has had long-lasting effects in American culture. President Nixon's negotiated withdrawal in 1973 was largely seen as an admission of

---

[261] Ibid., 78.

[262] Dittmar and Michaud, 7.

[263] Kimmel, 190.

[264] Rowe and Berg, 1.

failure.[265] Politically, the war precipitated changes in the foreign policy strategy of interventionism and how the president could engage troops with the War Powers Act of 1973.[266] The act forbade presidents from committing troops in any area for longer than sixty days without congressional approval.[267] However, in the late 1970s, conservatives began to rail against the "post-Vietnam War syndrome," which they claimed was characterized by "national self-doubt, military vacillation, and a failure of will to intervene overseas."[268] This conservative backlash foreshadowed the aggressive masculinity and increased militarism that emerged in the early 1980s with the election of President Ronald Reagan.

---

[265] Dittmar and Michaud, 178.

[266] Auster and Quart, 75.

[267] Ibid.

[268] Slocum, 243.

CHAPTER 4

1980s

No other president since John F. Kennedy was more conscious of the power of visual imagery than Ronald Reagan. He was a master at using what Hollywood has always known: that the American people are most comfortable in believing and understanding events that they can see. Film images verify and reveal history and eighties society was acutely aware of that eye-mind relationship.

—William Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*

Ronald Reagan's presidency heralded "morning in America." Perhaps now American men would awaken to a new, recharged manhood for a new, ambitious, and aggressive era. We've often thought of the 1980s as a decade of the reassertion of pride, the retrieval of political and metaphoric potency for America, and hence, for the American man. In a replay of the frontier cowboy myth, America was once again sitting tall in the saddle, willing to take on all comers, asserting its dominance in world affairs.

—Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*

American men in the 1980s were uniquely positioned to experience struggles in understanding their manhood due to the immense social change of the 1960s and 1970s. How could they reconcile the promises of the 1950s with the uncertainties, social change, and failures of the 1960s and 1970s? Who would be their role models now that for the first time in more than thirty years, John Wayne was absent from the list of most admired American men?[269] For men, the 1980s was a period of continued economic and cultural instability. The struggles of the previous decade (especially the withdrawal from Vietnam) threatened American masculinity. In reality, the crisis of masculinity is constant throughout American history in the twentieth century. Rather than reworking and creating new definitions of masculinity to fit the new social landscape, the 1980s

---

[269] Kimmel, 212.

simply resurrected myths of the 1950s. The two decades bear a striking resemblance to each other: the United States emerged from war, enjoyed relative peace, feared nuclear engagement, and experienced social change.[270] President Ronald Reagan and the New Right championed a return to the idyllic view of life in the United States during the 1950s as depicted in television shows *Father Knows Best* (1954) and *Leave it to Beaver* (1957). The myths of the 1950s included the supremacy of the traditional family and the U.S. as an uncontested world super power. However, the 1960s and 1970s undermined these myths. Neither men nor women were happy with the social structure that separated public and private spheres and mandated certain gender roles. The United States also proved fallible, especially in the Vietnam War. Out of the cultural upheaval of the previous decades, a hypermasculinity emerged with the election of President Reagan in 1980. During his address at West Point's commencement in 1981, Reagan proclaimed, "The era of self-doubt is over."[271] Economically, socially, and militarily, efforts were made to "remasculinize" America.[272] American society initially embraced these efforts and public discourse began to emerge on Vietnam, especially in the form of film.

Efforts to deregulate institutions, attempts to roll back progress made by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and increased militarism characterized 1980s politics. President Jimmy Carter's election in 1976 occurred at a time of distrust in American politics, especially in the wake of the Watergate controversy, which forced President

---

[270] Palmer, ix.

[271] Howell Raines, "Reagan Vows U.S. will Press Effort to Build Defenses," *New York Times,* May 28, 1981, accessed April 3, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/ 1981/05/28/us/reagan-vows-us-will-press-effort-to-build-defenses.html.

[272] Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, xii.

Nixon to resign.[273] Carter set a tone of ethical conduct in the White House, but several

events at the end of his first term proved detrimental to his re-election bid. The Russian

invasion of Afghanistan and the taking of fifty-two American hostages in Iran in 1979

exacerbated U.S. military insecurities.[274] The secret rescue attempt of the hostages in

1980 failed due to a sandstorm and mechanical failures.[275] With the Vietnam War still in

recent memory, this catastrophe further damaged the image of the U.S. military as a

technological super power.[276] Seven aircraft were destroyed and eight U.S. soldiers

died.[277] Additionally, as Iran collapsed into revolution gasoline prices soared and

inflation reached a staggering 14 percent.[278] President Carter's sole hope for winning re-

election rested on either a successful rescue attempt or the release of the hostages; neither

materialized and Reagan was elected the next president of the United States.[279]

More so than any American president since John F. Kennedy, Reagan merged

politics and culture.[280] Reagan's narrative prior to election evoked a story in three parts.

---

[273] Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 29.

[274] Palmer, 16.

[275] Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 36.

[276] Palmer, 16.

[277] Johnson, 36.

[278] Ibid., 34.

[279] Coral Bell, *The Reagan Paradox: U.S. Foreign Policy in the 1980s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 81.

[280] Troy, 11.

Part one told the "sad tale" of America in the 1960s and 1970s.[281] According to Reagan, during those decades America was socially demoralized, plagued by inflation, hampered by big government, and outmaneuvered by the Soviets.[282] The second part of the story introduced the "hero"—Reagan—whose patriotic rhetoric and optimism promised a revolution that was based on lowering taxes, strengthening the military, and cutting government regulations in order to boost the economy.[283] His election in 1980 heralded the third part of the story, "Morning in America," and promised the restoration of America to its rightful place as a preeminent world power, and implicitly, men's dominant role within American culture.[284] This was a story that Americans were desperate to hear.

The beginning of Reagan's presidency solidified the changing perception of America's status, and his creation of the myth that he was a "real man."[285] First, the American hostages in Iran were released minutes after he took his inaugural oath.[286] The second event was the assassination attempt that took place nine weeks after his inauguration on March 21, 1981.[287] He survived the attack despite having a bullet lodged

---

[281] Ibid., 12.

[282] Ibid.

[283] Ibid.

[284] Kimmel, 211.

[285] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 11.

[286] Johnson, 154.

[287] Ibid., 153.

one inch from his heart, proving his masculine strength despite his older age.[288] His

survival and the manner in which he reacted—quipping to his wife, "Honey, I forgot to

duck" and to the doctors working on him, "I hope you're all Republicans"—showed great

courage under adversity and elevated his reputation and legend.[289] His response to the air

traffic controllers strike four months into his presidency supported his image as a strong

president.[290] His decision to fire all 11,600 of the controllers to break the strike was bold

and confident, exactly the type of decisiveness the American public craved.[291] America

desperately needed a leader, and a new model of American manhood to restore its

confidence; Reagan—the former Hollywood actor, film enthusiast, and storyteller—

proved the perfect man for the role.[292]

Economic volatility characterized the 1980s. The beginning of the decade was

plagued by rampant inflation reaching 22.3 percent in the fall of 1980, with a prime

borrowing rate of 11.25 percent.[293] The recession in 1982 and the stock market crash in

1987 further complicated the economic situation. Following World War II, the United

States was the lone great, undamaged economy in the world and accounted for half of the

---

[288] Ibid.

[289] Ibid., 161.

[290] Ibid., 153.

[291] Ibid.

[292] Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1999), 360.

[293] Troy, 27.

world's production; by the 1980s, U.S. production had shrunk to 22 percent.[294] Reagan's supply-side economics that favored tax cuts promised to stimulate the economy, lower inflation, increase the savings rate, and ultimately raise tax revenue.[295] However, tax cuts, along with huge increases in military spending, almost guaranteed the cut of social welfare programs.[296] Conservatives in the 1980s were intent on dismantling the social welfare programs created by the New Deal under President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression.[297] Reagan's first budget proposal to Congress included a $1.3 trillion increase in defense spending.[298] The argument was that while the tax cuts would hurt many lower-class Americans in the short-run, in the long-term all would benefit.[299] However, the theory of "a rising tide lifts all boats" turned out to be false.[300] The regressive tax policies overwhelmingly supported the rich more than the poor and served to widen the gap between the two.[301] In addition to the tax policies, Reagan moved to deregulate many institutions including industries, financial markets, and lending institutions, which had wide-ranging and long-term effects on the economy.[302]

---

[294] Bell, 141.

[295] Johnson, 98.

[296] Ibid., 110.

[297] Ibid., 97.

[298] Ibid., 155.

[299] Ibid., 111.

[300] Ibid.

[301] Ibid.

[302] Ibid., 156.

Masculine heroes in the mold of the national myth of America's self-made man emerged from a new frontier, Wall Street. Mergers and acquisitions greatly increased during this period with leveraged buyouts increasing from $3.1 billion in 1981 to $67.4 billion in 1988.[303] Industry deregulation removed safeguards that were put in place following the crash in 1929 that precipitated the Great Depression.[304] A Machiavellian ends justifies the means approach characterized this period on Wall Street. Ivan Boesky and Michael Milken made names for themselves as self-made businessmen who would do anything to make money.[305] In his famous speech at Berkeley in 1985, Boesky proclaimed, "Greed is all right. . . . Everybody should be a little bit greedy. . . . You shouldn't feel guilty."[306] They are examples of the pervasiveness of 1980s hypermasculinity throughout culture.

For individual families in the 1980s, it was increasingly difficult to survive on one income.[307] Downward mobility was more common for young Americans; most of them would not be able to afford to buy the houses they grew up in during their childhoods.[308] Record high mortgage interest rates made it difficult for young couples and families to buy homes. Increasingly, women joined the workforce out of necessity to help provide for their families. By the end of the decade, a record 42 percent of households featured

---

[303] Ibid., 432.

[304] Ibid., 225.

[305] Ibid., 223.

[306] Ibid., 215.

[307] Chambers and Culbert, 111.

[308] Kimmel, 216.

full-time working women.[309] Men were increasingly forced to adapt to new roles at work, and at home, with this influx of women in the workforce.[310] The Yankelovich Monitor survey, a large nationwide survey given over a period of twenty years leading up to the 1980s, asked its subjects to define masculinity.[311] The overwhelming response was "being a good provider for his family."[312] However, the traditional male breadwinner during the 1980s supported only 8 percent of U.S. households and the average young man earned 25 to 30 percent less than his counterpart did in the early 1970s.[313] No wonder men felt confused and frustrated; the sole breadwinner model of the 1950s no longer worked. Additionally, women's strides towards economic equality are cited as one reason for the so-called "backlash" against the women's movement.[314] More women in the workforce directly threatened men's ability to prove their manhood through the role of provider.

This backlash against the gains made by the various social movements of the previous decades made it seem as if social rights were a zero sum game; advances made by women, minorities, and gays supposedly encroached upon the rights of white

---

[309] Johnson, 151.

[310] Ibid.

[311] Faludi, *Backlash*, 65.

[312] Ibid.

[313] Ibid.

[314] Susan Faludi's important text, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, describes this phenomenon as the acute stage in an episode of resurgence of fear and loathing of feminism that constitutes a backlash to women's advancement. Faludi, *Backlash*, xix.

American men. Men's rights groups gained traction and religious groups such as the Moral Majority were influential in the political arena. Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, and his religious conservatives of the New Right movement supported a range of policies to repeal many of the gains of the women's movement made during the previous decade. A New Right minister declared to fellow supporters, "We're not here to get into politics. We're here to turn the clock back to 1954 in this country."[315] The central argument of the "backlash" was that women's equality was responsible for women's unhappiness.[316] They also claimed that the women's movement was responsible for "promoting materialism over moral values" and "dismantling the traditional family support system."[317] These traditionalists believed that masculinity would be saved if women returned to the private sphere, where they biologically and theologically belonged.[318] The second group that supported the backlash was "men's rights" activists who claimed that women had already achieved equality and were now infringing upon the rights of men.[319] The discourse changed men from the oppressors to the oppressed.

The conservative right attacked many laws that expanded women's rights. Reagan was the first president to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment, even though the American public favored it two to one.[320] He also favored a ban on abortions unless it

---

[315] Faludi, *Backlash*, 230.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Ibid.

[318] Kimmel, 218.

[319] Ibid.

[320] Johnson, 158.

threatened the mother's life, a view, which again, ran contrary to American popular opinion.[321] "No-fault" divorce laws that many states passed in the 1970s made it easier to obtain divorces and split up assets.[322] The New Right attacked these laws for supposedly undermining the traditional family despite the fact that by 1980, 50 percent of marriages ended in divorce.[323] Conservatives touted the nuclear family as a solution to the social problems of the 1980s, ignoring the "traditional" family's role in supporting the Vietnam War, and both men and women's struggles within that social construct.[324] The nuclear family of the 1950s encouraged young men to follow in their father's footsteps and prove their manhood in war, while fathers failed to pass on what war was really like. These young men went to war with visions of *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and John Wayne, but experienced a very different war, a war that the American public failed to support and mythologize in the same ways as World War II. Arguably, both men and women were not entirely happy with the traditional family of the 1950s. Men struggled with their roles as anonymous cogs in a corporate wheel supporting families that resided in identical homes in suburban sprawl. Women struggled to reconcile their economic participation during World War II with their status as suburban housewives. The Moral Majority not

---

[321] Ibid.

[322] Faludi, 19.

[323] Coontz, 263.

[324] Rowe and Berg, 6.

only advocated against women's rights, they also advocated for a strong military to stand up to the Soviet Union and stop the spread of communism.[325]

Militarily, Reagan ordered the largest peacetime military buildup in history.[326] He even brought back into service the battleships of World War II, symbols of American military power.[327] He promised to "stand tall" against communist threats from Afghanistan to Central America.[328] His choice of phrase to describe his stance against communism was important because next to President Kennedy, he was the president who most successfully used myth and imagery to convey important messages to the American public.[329] Kennedy spoke of a New Frontier in his inaugural address while Reagan spoke of himself in terms straight from a Western film. Military actions taken during the 1980s can be seen as attempts to redeem the American military, and offer an opportunity to make up for the failure in Vietnam.

The foreign policy strategy of "negotiation through strength" that characterized this period actually originated in the late 1940s due to the perceived change in strategic balance of the world after World War II.[330] Reagan's declarations regarding the military build-up exaggerated the need, and dramatized the actual increases. The image of a

---

[325] Walter H. Capps, *The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1982), 122.

[326] Ibid., 155.

[327] Johnson, 157.

[328] Capps, 155.

[329] Palmer, xii.

[330] Bell, 27.

renewed, strong American military was more important than the reality.[331] Central

America was largely the focus of the projection of this strength. With Secretary of State

Alexander Haig, Reagan was looking for a "good Vietnam," a military conflict against

communism that the United States could quickly and decisively win.[332] The military

invasion of Grenada in 1983 to oust Cuban advisors was an example of this strength

projection in 1983. After the invasion, Reagan pronounced, "Americans are now standing

tall in the saddle."[333] Conveniently, the invasion of Grenada happened days after the

tragic insurgent bombing in Lebanon and distracted the American public from the loss of

241 Marines.[334] A few months later, Reagan ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops from

Lebanon. Complicating U.S. involvement in Central America was the War Powers Act of

1973. Reagan found that the act constrained his options for dealing with perceived

communist threats.[335] To circumvent Congress, illegal support for the anti-Sandinista

Contras in the form of monetary aid was routed from the proceeds of secret arms sales to

Iran.[336] The scandal was unveiled in 1986 and led to an investigation and congressional

hearings that ultimately cleared Reagan of culpability.[337]

---

[331] Bell, 66-67.

[332] Capps, 155.

[333] Kimmel, 211.

[334] Capps, 155.

[335] Auster and Quart, 76.

[336] Bell, 101.

[337] Johnson, 333.

New interpretations of the Vietnam War began to emerge in the 1980s. Blame for the failure to win shifted from those who created the war to anti-war protestors.[338] Veterans, who were visible reminders for the war, found themselves in the middle of this controversy.[339] Many narratives of the war during this period focused on the experiences of those veterans and portrayed a new interpretation of the war. In *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), Rambo asks, "Sir, do we get to win this time?"[340] This is an example of the portrayal of veterans as "'victims of society, government, and the war itself."[341] Representing these men as victims changed the role of white men as oppressors in society that came out of the social movement discourse in the 1960s and 1970s. Susan Jeffords' text *Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* addressed this issue:

> Thus much recent representation is geared towards establishing the veteran as victim for displaying a presumed discrimination by women against men. And presumably, as the veteran has suffered, so have American men as a whole. In these terms, women have made their gains toward equality at the expense of men, particularly the veteran who was absented from the competitive race for jobs, education, prestige. But even those men who were not in the war suffered as well, because what the women's movement challenged most directly was not individual men themselves but the idea of masculinity. So while particular veterans may indeed have lost places in businesses and college, American men lost their "place" en masse when their manhood was put in jeopardy.[342]

America needed a new story that countered the theme of failure that emerged out of Vietnam and the 1970s. As Susan Faludi claimed: "The nation sought a fantasy to redeem

---

[338] Capps, 149.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Kimmel, 211.

[341] Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, xiv.

[342] Ibid., 120.

71

its manhood, and it would find no better ringmaster than the great fabulist himself, Ronald Reagan."[343]

Despite the economic and social efforts and the hardline militarist stance of the Reagan administration, manhood in America was still in crisis. Economic and political measures to spur the economy largely served to help only the upper class and widened the class gap. The backlash against feminism did little to make men feel more secure in their roles or masculinity. The covert operations and military actions taken during this period did not restore American dominance abroad. President Reagan and the events of the 1980s were largely rhetoric and image-based shows of power. Kimmel argued, "Power is not something to be applied like a fashion accessory; it is an inner confidence and security, as well as a real hierarchical position. This kind of power American men still did not feel."[344]

---

[343] Faludi, *Stiffed*, 360.

[344] Kimmel, 211.

CHAPTER 5

VIETNAM WAR FILM ANALYSIS

War stories are always looking back and looking ahead. They are telling the story of a war that has already occurred at the same time they are preparing for a war yet to come. Stories are often told by interested parties, parties who have particular points of view about specific wars or wars in general or both. Stories are told to individuals and to nations, and they play a significant role in determining whether individuals and nations are willing to go to war. The stories are important because they tell audiences not simply about wars but about moralities, about men and women, and about one's place in the social order.
—Susan Jeffords, "Telling the War Story"

The films in this study reveal similar themes and narratives regarding norms of American masculinity. They depict themes of anxiety with the enduring myths of war service and masculinity from World War II while simultaneously commenting on the 1980s' revival of these same myths following their intense questioning during the 1960s/1970s social turmoil and the Vietnam War. The five films—*Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Hamburger Hill*, *Casualties of War*, and *Born on the Fourth of July*—focus on the individual American male soldier's experience during combat and in *Born on the Fourth of July*, the reintegration process. These war films tell stories not only about American men's Vietnam War experience, but also their experience of masculinity in war.

Analyzing masculinity requires a baseline understanding and common mental model of it as a concept. Chapter 2 discusses currently accepted theories of masculinity that form the basis of this study.[345] Two important aspects of masculinity are its social

---

[345] The following four seminal texts form the basis of the masculinity framework used to analyze films: Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of*

construction, indicating instability, and the necessity of reiteration of masculinity norms,

suggesting masculinity must continually be proven. Analyzing norms of masculinity

portrayed in these films enables an understanding of the state of masculinity in the 1980s.

The four major norms of masculinity analyzed are: becoming a man, relationships,

defining masculinity by others, and the physical body. These categories of masculinity

norms do not have finite boundaries and are often connected to each other. Thus, the film

analysis often discusses points or scenes that cross over to multiple categories. For

instance, the rape scenes are analyzed within the context of looking at how accusations of

homosexuality—defining masculinity against an other—pressure men to participate in

rape and the role of the physical body in the act of rape. The two lenses of analysis reveal

different, yet important points, regarding masculinity.

This chapter begins with an analysis of the process of becoming a man and the

importance of its role in young men's lives. The transformation process is traced from the

preparation men experience as young boys through basic training to combat. The second

section discusses men's complicated relationships and the role these relationships play in

constructing masculinity. Men's relationships with silent biological fathers, adopted

fathers, each other, and women are explored. The next section analyzes the use of others

to construct a definition of masculinity. These others—the enemy, minorities,

homosexuals, and women—are routinely used as examples of what men should not be.

Representations of the dichotomy of femininity and masculinity and plurality of

---

Identity, and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*; R.W. Connell's
Masculinities; Todd W. Reeser's *Masculinities in Theory*.

masculinity are scrutinized. Finally, the last section examines the use and role of the male body. At the biological level, the male body is the most basic expression of masculinity.

Analysis of these norms reveals critiques of national myths from World War II including the American war hero, war service as a path to manhood, and a monolithic American masculinity. The films also show a continuation of the crisis of masculinity from the previous decades and a tempering of the bravado and hypermasculinity of the early eighties.

<div align="center">Becoming a Man</div>

All of the films address the process of becoming a man through war service. Common themes include myths of war service, the difference between expectations and reality, and the initial transformation of men in basic training and then again once in country. World War II references are used in various ways to emphasize its considerable influence on the characters. The films show national influences, such as President Kennedy's famous inauguration speech that appealed to citizens' patriotism and sense of duty to country. Family and friends also inspired the characters to go to war as a rite of passage and continue the family legacy of war participation. The beginnings of the films depict the characters as believing that military service in time of war is a necessary and commendable duty. However, their experiences in Vietnam, and in the case of Ron Kovic in *Born on the Fourth of July*, their return to the United States, often contradict the messages that convinced them to serve. Ultimately, their families, the military, and their country, deceived the main characters of these films—white, middle-class men—into participating in the Vietnam War. The films also show the transformation of the characters as they progress through the indoctrination of basic training and then their first

experiences in the war. Basic training strips the men of their individual identity. This process is especially depicted in *Full Metal Jacket*. The film critiques the process, and shows that not all men survive indoctrination. New soldiers in country also go through a transformation process. Upon arrival in Vietnam, they are initially ignored, considered a burden, and given derogatory names such as "fucking new guy" (FNG) and "cherry."[346] These new soldiers are eventually accepted into their units as equals once they prove their worth to the other men, but this acceptance seems hollow. The men prove their worthiness as soldiers, but not necessarily their manhood.

In the film *Born on the Fourth of July*, Ron Kovic's education in the national construction and definition of masculinity and American manhood began as a young boy. In the opening scene of the film, Kovic and his young friends are running in the woods playing war. These boys' communities encourage them to participate in this ritual of fighting and violence because it is part of the growing up process for American boys. Playing war is an acceptable socialization activity because fighting in wars is traditionally thought of as an honorable act. Throughout the rest of the film, other factors are shown that socialize and prepare Kovic to make his decision to enlist in the Marines. His family is shown at a Fourth of July parade. Kovic is seated upon his father's shoulders and watches in awe as the veterans of pervious wars march past. Next, he is up at bat at a baseball game and makes the game winning hit. His father is shown hoisting him up, his cheering teammates surrounding him. A scene in the family living room follows this classic American 1950s iconography. Kovic is shown watching a nationally televised

---

[346] These terms for servicemembers who are new to Vietnam are used throughout all of the films.

address by President Kennedy with his family. Kennedy delivers the famous phrase, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."[347] Although young at this point in the film—he is only eleven or twelve years old—Kovic internalizes this request from the President of the United States and later describes it as one of the most important reasons influencing his decision to go to Vietnam. Family members are also shown influencing young men to go to war. After Kovic enlists, his mother tells him that she is proud of him. His father does not offer the same encouragement. This suggests that women encouraged young men more to participate in the war than their silent fathers.

Kovic's experience listening to Marine recruiters at a high school sponsored lecture provide inspiration for his enlistment. The two recruiters are wearing their dress uniforms and look professional, sharp, and serious—like real men. One of the recruiters explains the demanding thirteen-week boot camp experience at Parris Island. He dares the young men in the audience to enlist, and "Find out if you really are a man."[348] By presenting them with this challenge, he manipulates their need, as boys coming of age, to prove their manliness and worth. The recruiter goes on to explain the legacy of the Marines, "We have never lost a war."[349] By becoming Marines, the boys could become a part of this rich history and legacy of success and prove themselves as real men.

---

[347] *Born on the Fourth of July*, directed by Oliver Stone (Universal Pictures, 1989), DVD (Universal Studios, 2004).

[348] Ibid.

[349] Ibid.

In *Platoon*, Chris Taylor's family also has a strong influence on his enlistment. He dropped out of college and volunteered for Vietnam because he wanted to live up to what his grandfather did in World War I and what his father did in World War II. He feels responsible to carry on the family legacy of service during times of war. The other men in his unit are incredulous when he tells them his reasons for joining the military. One soldier exclaimed, "You volunteered for this shit?"[350] The film portrays Taylor's enlistment as the result of not only his sense of duty to carry on the family legacy, but also as a means of rebellion. He explains his parents' disapproval with his enlistment to his grandmother in a letter, "They wanted me to be just like them: respectable, hardworking, a little house, family. They drove me crazy with their goddamn world Grandma."[351] His sense of duty and responsibility transcends his economic status and highlights generational differences. He wants to blend in as one of the guys who makes sacrifices, even though his participation in the war is negotiated under very different terms.

Staff Sergeant Franz in *Hamburger Hill* expresses a similar sentiment regarding service. He initially volunteers to serve in Vietnam with a buddy from home. This friend then refuses to go to Vietnam. One of Franz's fellow soldiers agrees with his buddy's decision. Franz retorts, "No way . . . All I want from anybody is to get their ass in the

---

[350] *Platoon.*

[351] Ibid.

grass with the rest of us. You don't have to like it. But you have to show up."[352] The insinuation is that serving, as bad as it may be, is what real men do.

Several films show tongue in cheek references to World War II and Western films. The epigraph in chapter 1 is one example where the soldiers in a squad in *Full Metal Jacket* select roles for themselves in their own Western film with Joker as John Wayne. Throughout the film, Joker continuously references John Wayne through imitation. In *Platoon*, Bunny reassures another soldier who shares his foxhole, "Don't you worry Junior, you're hanging with Audie Murphy here my man."[353] Kovic's excitement after the recruiter presentation at his school in *Born on the Fourth* of July is displayed when he concedes to his friends over lunch after the lecture: "it's our chance to be a part of history!"[354] Myths of World War II success and military service in a time of war are connected to his transition into manhood.

The reality of war service in Vietnam turned out to be very different from what characters initially expected. During a lull in fighting in Hue City, a war correspondent interviews the men in Joker's squad. The squad leader, Cowboy, reveals his expectation of what war was like based on a World War II context of combat. He says, "When we're in Hue, when we're in Hue city, it's like war. You know, like what, what, what I thought about a war. What I thought a war was supposed to be. There's the enemy, kill 'em."[355]

---

[352] *Hamburger Hill,* directed by John Irvin (Paramount Pictures, 1987), DVD (Lionsgate, 2007).

[353] *Platoon*.

[354] *Born on the Fourth of July.*

[355] *Full Metal Jacket*.

79

The irony of this statement appears later in the film when the majority of the squad is

killed in this World War II style fighting. The men are killed not by the traditional

enemy—another male soldier—but by a female Viet Cong sniper.

Platoon's Taylor expresses optimism about what he can learn from serving in

Vietnam. While standing guard in a narrated scene, he reads a letter to his grandmother.

He talks about learning something from the experience that reveals the shallowness of the

life he left behind in the United States:

> Maybe I found it way down here in the mud. Maybe from down here I can start up
> again and be something I can be proud of, without having to fake it, be a fake
> human being. Maybe I can see something I don't yet see, or learn something I
> don't yet know.[356]

His expectation to learn something that will make him more than he already is reaches a

questionable resolution at the end of the film. He learns about the confusion and

exhaustion of combat, in addition to the horrors of war and the contradictory nature of

men through the platoon's in-fighting. Joker in *Full Metal Jacket* also experiences the

contradictions in war. In an interview, he sarcastically says that he enlisted because, "I

wanted to meet interesting and stimulating people of an ancient culture and kill them. I

wanted to be the first kid on my block to get a confirmed kill."[357] He finally has the

opportunity to kill when the squad finds the sniper that killed their fellow soldiers. He

hesitates to shoot the female sniper at first. Even though his statement explaining his

service may have been tongue in cheek, shooting a non-uniformed female enemy at

point-blank was certainly not the situation that he imagined making his first kill.

---

[356] *Platoon.*

[357] *Full Metal Jacket.*

After his return from Vietnam, it is clear that Kovic was beginning to have conflicting feelings about his service in Vietnam. He questions his participation in the war and the reasons that led him to volunteer for it. One night he returns home belligerently drunk and starts a violent argument with his mother and father. He slurred: "Go fight, go kill. It's all a lie."[358] He feels deceived by his country and his family, and ultimately by the reasons that led him to join the Marines and fight in Vietnam. His mother seems confused and visibly upset. She pleadingly asked him, "What did they do to you in that war?"[359] Ron continued with his rampage:

> We shot women and children. Thou shall not kill. Isn't that what you taught us? . . . Fucking communism won, it's all for nothing. It's a lie . . . God is as dead as my legs. There's no God. There's no country. There's only me and this wheelchair.[360]

Kovic feels he was deceitfully convinced to go to war and the deepest wound comes from the realization that his good intentions will never be fully recognized. Honorable values influenced and inspired this small town suburban boy to fight in a war that was anything but respectable.

The film shows that Kovic's disillusionment was produced in part by his anger and frustration at the deceitful influences that persuaded him to join the military. He was not welcomed back to his community as a war hero, but as a poor young man whose legs and youth had been stolen by lies. The values that led to his enlistment did not coincide with the national understanding and interpretation of the war, which in turn created a

---

[358] *Born on the Fourth of July*.

[359] Ibid.

[360] Ibid.

deep internal conflict for Kovic. The reasons he enlisted and his experiences during basic

training and combat did not fulfill his expectations of what military service was supposed

to be, and what it meant to him, his family, and the nation.

All of the films depict the process of transformation the men go through in basic

training and combat. *Full Metal Jacket* depicts the process of deconstruction in basic

training, which develops recruits and draftees into physically and emotionally hardened

soldiers. The film shows the effects of the physical, and more importantly, mental and

emotional transformation these young men experience. Men new to Vietnam must also

go through a sort of hazing process before they are accepted into their unit. This

transformation process turns them from cherries or fucking new guys into real soldiers

that the other men respect. Simply volunteering for service, making it through basic

training, or arriving in country to Vietnam mean nothing. New soldiers must prove

themselves to the more seasoned veterans before they are accepted as equals.

Full Metal Jacket traces the transformation of a group of men through basic

training, which is portrayed as a stressful and uncomfortable experience. The men go

through long arduous days of training and receive constant harassment from their drill

instructors. They are systematically taught to replace their individual selves with an

unemotional and precise military exterior. In the film's opening scene, the senior drill

instructor delivers a searing speech to the new recruits:

> If you ladies leave my island, if you survive recruit training, you will be a
> weapon. You will be a minister of death praying for war. But until that day you
> are pukes. You are the lowest form of life on earth. You're not even human
> fucking beings. You are nothing but unorganized grabastic pieces of amphibian
> shit. Because I am hard, you will not like me. But the more you hate me, the more
> you will learn. I am hard, but I am fair. There is no racial bigotry. I do not look

down upon niggers, kikes, wops, or greasers. Here you are all equally worthless.[361]

The reason for the recruits' presence at the Marine training center is clear; they are not there to prove their patriotism or make their families proud. They are there to learn how to become disciplined fighting machines that kill, and kill effectively. They are not applauded for their decision to join the Marines, and whether they enlisted or were drafted is insignificant.

While some recruits were able to resist the more harmful effects of this indoctrination, others are not. The recruit nicknamed "Gomer Pyle" is an example of a young man who struggles with the indoctrination.[362] He is out of shape, seemingly mentally slow, yet good-natured. Pyle's goofy nature changes after severe punishment from both the drill instructor and his fellow recruits. He is quite literally beaten and forced to transform into a hollow machine-like version of himself. He begins to outperform peers in tasks such as putting his weapon together, but his demeanor is altered. He becomes serious and obsessed with learning about his rifle and perfectly performing every drill and exercise.

At the end of the basic training sequence in the film, Joker catches Pyle in the bathroom with his rifle and a loaded magazine. Joker tries to reason with Pyle telling him that they will both "be in a world of shit" if the drill instructor catches them.[363] Pyle

---

[361] *Full Metal Jacket*.

[362] Ibid.

[363] Ibid.

responds, "I am in a world of shit."[364] Pyle then starts executing drill movements and reciting the rifle creed. The drill instructor wakes up, runs into the bathroom, and demands Pyle hand over his rifle. Pyle carefully aims the rifle and shoots the drill instructor. He then sits down, places the barrel of the rifle in his mouth and pulls the trigger.

The deliberate act of killing himself shows Pyle rejecting the indoctrination process that tried to instill in him the philosophy to follow orders and not think. The rifle is metaphorically masculinity and femininity, a weapon synonymous with his own male penis and according to the drill instructor, the only pussy the recruits are getting that they are forced to give a female name. Placing the rifle in his mouth and pulling the trigger, Pyle symbolically delivers the final self-imposed punishment blow for his inability to live to up standards of masculinity. He lost himself in the transformation process, and although he was finally able to conform and even outperform his peers, the contradictory nature of expectations killed him. This reveals a blatant criticism of the construction of masculinity and the achievement of manhood.

The first half of the film critiques this process of indoctrination and shows that some men are unable to withstand the dehumanizing effects of basic training. The second half of the film critiques combat as a rite of passage for men. Military service during war, then, is a not a true path to manhood, since not all men will make it through and even if they do, they do not attain manhood in combat either. The title of the movie is revealing. A full metal jacket is a nickname for the metal protective case around a lead bullet. It also symbolizes the indoctrination process throughout recruit training that later serves as

---

[364] *Full Metal Jacket*.

84

protective armor for these young men. For Pyle, the armor—or process of becoming a man through basic training—failed.

The final scene in *Full Metal Jacket* echoes the theme of the failed myths of war service. As Joker and his fellow Marines march out of Hue City after heavy fighting, they ironically start singing the Mickey Mouse Club song. Joker narrates, "My thoughts drift back to erect nipple wet dreams of Mary Jane Rottencrotch and the great homecoming fuck fantasy. I am so happy that I am alive, in one piece, and short. I am in a world of shit, yes. But I am alive and I am not afraid."[365] The singing of the boyhood Mickey Mouse Club song suggests the film critiques the process of transformation men are supposed to attain through military service, and one of the ultimate tests of manhood— combat. Joker's focus on returning home to Mary Jane Rottencrotch—the same young woman the drill instructor told the recruits to forget about—suggests he has not transformed into a real man. His repetition of the same phrase Pyle said before shooting himself, "I am in a world of shit," is an acknowledgment that he realizes the catch-22 process of becoming a man.[366] Rather than opt out, like Pyle, he accepts reality.

Despite the training and discipline, new soldiers learn during basic training, the films show that they are not ready for combat in Vietnam. The more experienced men call these new soldiers in Vietnam cherries and generally avoid them. *Born on the Fourth of July* reveals this contempt of new soldiers. Kovic visits the family of a Marine that he thought he accidentally killed in Vietnam. He apologizes, "I didn't know Billy real well,

---

[365] *Full Metal Jacket*.

[366] Ibid.

he was kind of quiet. We didn't talk much to new guys."[367] The new men arrive idealistic

and optimistic, but are quickly confronted with the grisly reality of combat. In addition to

the confusion, they feel with the environment, many of the other men do not initially

accept them or help them acclimate to combat. In *Hamburger Hill*, a squad leader, Staff

Sergeant Franz, addresses his new soldiers:

> You people will not die on me in combat. You fucking new guys will do
> everything to prove me wrong. You'll walk on trails, kick cans, sleep on guard,
> smoke dope, and diddly-bop through the bush like you were back on the block.
> When you're on guard at night, you'll write letters, play with your organ, and
> think of your girl back home. Forget her . . . People I am tired of filling body bags
> with your dumb fucking mistakes.[368]

The lecture reveals that these new soldiers are unprepared for what they face in combat

and highlights veteran soldiers' disdain for new men.

Platoon begins with Taylor's arrival in Vietnam. He steps off the plane on a dusty

landing zone and the first thing he sees is body bags. The members of his platoon give

him a lukewarm welcome and affectionately call him "fucking cherry."[369] Sergeant Elias

is the only soldier who tries to help Taylor adjust when he first arrives, telling him what

equipment is not necessary on patrols. In a monologue, Taylor describes his experience in

a letter to his grandmother:

> The hardest thing I think I've ever done is go on point, three times this week. I
> don't even know what I'm doing. A gook could be standing three feet in front of
> me and I wouldn't know it. I'm so tired . . . It's scary because nobody tells me
> how to do anything because I'm new. Nobody cares about the new guys, they
> don't even want to know your name. The unwritten rule is that a new guy's life
> isn't worth as much because he hasn't put his time in yet. And they say if you're

---

[367] *Born on the Fourth of July*.

[368] *Hamburger Hill*.

[369] *Platoon*.

going to get killed in the 'Nam it's better to get it in the first few weeks. The logic being that you don't suffer that much.[370]

His anxiety and confusion are clear. When he sees his first body in the field, he pukes. Not until he survives his first patrol and wounding does he begin to feel more confident in his ability to survive. When he returns to his platoon after being treated for his wound, one of the soldiers asks, "What are you doing in the underworld, Taylor?"[371] Another soldier proclaims, "This here isn't Taylor. Taylor been shot. This man here is Chris, he's been resurrected."[372] Taylor successfully went through the transformation process, survived, and was accepted by the other men.

Full Metal Jacket also traces the transformation of a young man, "Rafterman," a combat cameraman.[373] Rafterman eagerly volunteers to accompany Joker to document the fighting in Hue City. Joker's superior officer orders him to take Rafterman and says he is responsible for him. In one scene, as they are traveling on a helicopter to Hue City, Rafterman is visibly trying not to get sick. During the initial fighting, he seems nervous and uncertain. Rafterman and Joker go into a building to find the sniper that killed several men in their squad. Joker finds the female Viet Cong sniper, but is out of ammunition. She turns and fires on him, seemingly about to kill him. Rafterman comes out of nowhere and guns her down without hesitation. As other members of the squad join them, Rafterman excitedly exclaims, "I saved Joker's ass. I got the sniper. I fucking blew her

---

[370] *Platoon.*

[371] Ibid.

[372] Ibid.

[373] *Full Metal Jacket.*

away!"[374] He seems surprised and relieved at his transformation from scared combat cameraman to killer.

Hamburger Hill presents a more ambivalent attitude towards the transformation process of new soldiers. After his first patrol, Private Languilli excitedly exclaims to his squad leader, "We did good today. We got our cherries busted today didn't we Sarge?!"[375] His squad leader, Sergeant Franz, unenthusiastically replies, "One of my people got killed. That's all that happened today."[376] The contradictory nature of these responses is confusing to the new men. How are they to be accepted? At the end of the film, the squad finally takes Hill 937 after many attempts. Two of the new guys, Privates Beletski and Washburn, from the beginning of the film, survive and make it to the top. There they find Franz injured. Washburn takes out his water canteen and hands it to Beletski who shakes it to see who much water is in it. This references an earlier scene when Franz taught him never to go on a patrol with a half-empty canteen because of the noise it makes. He then takes out a rag, pours water on it and wipes Franz's head. The transformation has come full circle as Beletski is now taking care of Franz.

The films make clear that men initially approach military service in Vietnam positively. They are heavily influenced by World War II myths of the soldier-hero and becoming a man through war service. The disorienting experience of basic training and initial combat are transformation processes, but neither offers complete attainment of manhood. The reality of service in Vietnam falls far short of these idealistic young men's

---

[374] *Full Metal Jacket*.

[375] *Hamburger Hill*.

[376] Ibid.

expectations. Ron Kovic, especially, feels cheated because he loses the use of his legs through his service and upon returning home, his patriotism and sacrifice are neither acknowledged nor honored. The films' portrayal of the treatment of new soldiers suggests a critique of the relationships among men. The men who are most able to help the new men survive—the battle-hardened, experienced men—avoid this responsibility. It is a catch-22. The new soldiers need other men to survive, but the veterans refuse to help. Men fail in their responsibility to support other men and largely abdicate their roles as initiators in the transformation process, leaving individual men to navigate it alone. Symbolically this represents men's complicated relationships with each other in American society.

<div align="center">Relationships</div>

Men's relationships—with each other and with women—are a central theme of masculinity in all of the films. Men must prove their masculinity to each other continuously. Attainment of manhood, then, is a continuous process that other men assess. These relationships among men are vital to the construction of masculinity and span from intimate bonds to aggressive competitiveness. Complicated relationships with fathers—including authority figures and biological fathers—are portrayed in all of the films. *Platoon*, especially, explores the importance of adopted father figures when Taylor is forced to align himself with either Barnes and the "juicers" or Elias and the "heads."[377] The films show specific initiation and bonding rituals required to maintain these relationships. Barnes, Elias, and the character nicknamed "Animal Mother" in *Full Metal*

---

[377] *Platoon.*

Jacket represent a duality of man that also complicates these relationships.[378] Men have particularly tense relationships with women. These strained relationships complicate the reintegration process. *Born on the Fourth of July*, specifically, highlights this difference between Vietnam and World War II films. What is clear in the films is that the relationships of the men supersede all relationships the male characters have with women. Relationships among men are a defining factor in trying to prove masculinity.

Silent fathers and complicated relationships with these fathers are common themes amongst the films. In *Hamburger Hill*, Private Beletski's wife sends him a recorded message. She says:

> I had dinner with your Mom and Dad. Your Dad didn't say much, we both know what he's like. But Katherine (his mom) says he gets up early every morning and watches the news and eats his dinner in front of the TV at night. I think he's looking for you.[379]

Kovic's father is not supportive of Ron's decision to enlist. Instead of going to the prom, Ron packs for boot camp. He wanders into the living room and catches his father watching the news that is showing an interview with an Army officer in Vietnam. Ron asks his father what he thinks. His father solemnly replies, "13,000 miles is a long way to go fight a war."[380] His father's lack of support is not explained. His father does not offer advice or share his own war experiences.

Platoon also insinuates a complicated relationship between Taylor and his father. In one of his letters to his grandmother, Taylor says he misses her and his mother, but

---

[378] *Full Metal Jacket.*

[379] *Hamburger Hill.*

[380] *Born on the Fourth of July.*

90

does not mention his father. He is critical of his parent's desire for him to have a life like

their own with a little house and family. Kovic is also critical of his father's simple life.

One of the reasons he enlists in the Marines is because he does not want to end up like his

Dad, managing the local A&P grocery store. After he returns, a high school friend offers

Kovic a job at his hamburger restaurant. He tells him that he can work his way up to

manager, just like his Dad did at the A&P. Kovic seems annoyed at this suggestion. He

went to war to become something more than his father, not the same.

During a break in fighting in *Hamburger Hill*, the men talk about what cars they

are going to drive when they get back. One soldier says he is going to order a Firebird.

Another soldier mentions his Dad will not drive anything but a Buick. The conversation

implies that fathers pass on their preference in car brands to their sons, but not much else.

Likely, many of these men's fathers would have served in World War II. However, the

men never talk about their fathers' experiences during that war or any advice or lessons

that were passed to them. The emphasis on commercialism is important, as this was a

defining feature of men's lives in the 1960s, 1970s, and increasingly so in the 1980s. The

films depict a generational schism between World War II and Vietnam War men.

The schism between World War II veterans and Vietnam War veterans is

highlighted in one scene from *Born on the Fourth of July*. A World War II veteran

confronts Kovic at a bar after listening to him complain about the war. The older veteran

tells Kovic,

> You shove it up your ass pal. Is everybody supposed to feel sorry for you because
> you're in a fucking wheelchair? You think you're the only fucking Marine here.
> When I was on Iwo Jima we lost 5,000 men the first day. Don't go crying in your
> fucking beer to me. Now you served and you lost now you gotta live with it.

91

You're a Marine man. Semper Fi. You picked them, they didn't pick you. Quit you're fucking pissing and moaning.[381]

The films show that relationships with real fathers and the World War II generation are strained at best. Fathers failed to pass on lessons to their sons and explain that war is not all about glory and patriotism. They let the myths of World War II survive and influence their sons to enlist in a war that was very different from their own. Their silence also inhibited other initiation processes other than war service that their sons might have pursued to attain manhood.

The adopted father-son relationships of soldiers in Vietnam easily supersede the relationships with uninvolved biological fathers back home. These relationships reveal contradictory bonding rituals. In *Platoon*, Taylor is immediately confronted with the dilemma of which father to follow. Barnes and Elias are clearly at odds with each other and do not get along. His squad leader, Sergeant Elias is portrayed as a mythic warrior-hunter who embraces humanity and fosters a welcoming environment. He optimistically helps new soldiers—like Taylor—and gives advice so they can learn enough to survive their first few patrols. His group spends its down time smoking pot and dancing. Sergeant Barnes, the platoon sergeant, is the complete opposite. He surrounds himself with a loyal group of aggressive hardhearted soldiers. He is brutal in his actions and realistic about the horrors of war. His group unwinds by playing poker, drinking whiskey, and making fun of each other.

The heads group consists of a mix of black and white soldiers. After Taylor's wounding, Elias initiates him into the group of heads in a very homoerotic scene. After

---

[381] *Born on the Fourth of July*.

smoking from a pipe another solider handed him, Elias asks Taylor, "First time?"[382] The

question is a double entendre; does Elias mean his first time smoking pot or his first time

being intimate with another man? Elias then offers Taylor the barrel end of his weapon

and says, "Put your mouth on this."[383] Taylor does and Elias blows pot smoke down the

end of the barrel into Taylor's mouth. The scene symbolizes the popping of Taylor's

cherry. The men dance together while the song "Tracks of My Tears" plays in the

background.[384] The intimate scene exposes an initiation rite for Taylor and his acceptance

into the heads group.

The next scene in the film directly contrasts this more feminine, homoerotic

portrayal. Barnes' "juicers" are in their tent listening to country music and drinking beer

and whiskey. There is a Confederate flag hanging on the wall, insinuating a more

conservative crowd than the heads. One soldier, Bunny, claims, "Ain't nothing like a

piece of pussy, 'cept maybe the Indy 500."[385] The lieutenant of the platoon walks in

wearing an Ohio State wrestling t-shirt. Bunny takes his beer can, rips a piece of it off

with his teeth, and hands it to the lieutenant. Barnes, O'Neil (a squad leader), and several

other soldiers are playing poker. Barnes asks if the lieutenant wants to play. The

lieutenant responds, "I wouldn't want to get raped by you guys."[386] He is obviously

joking, but the atmosphere is charged with testosterone and aggression. After the

---

[382] *Platoon.*

[383] Ibid.

[384] Ibid.

[385] Ibid.

[386] Ibid.

lieutenant leaves, O'Neil remarks that he is the type of guy who does not make it out of Vietnam. These men seem to be constantly performing a type of ultra masculinity for each other.

Men's strained relationships with women are depicted in several films. At the beginning of *Hamburger Hill*, two new soldiers get into a fight after one of the soldiers produces a picture of his wife. The squad leader separates the men and forces them to shake hands. He tells them, "We don't start fights, we finish 'em."[387] He diffuses the situation and implies the new most important relationship for the men is with each other and not girlfriends or wives back home. In another scene, a soldier receives a Dear John letter from his girlfriend. She tells him she is not going to write anymore because her friends in college say that it is immoral to write to him. The other men in the squad are silent and one of the men sits down next to the soldier and hugs him. Kovic experiences similar disappoint with a love interest when he reunites with his high school sweetheart in *Born on the Fourth of July* at her university. The young woman is heavily involved in the anti-war movement and tries to convince Kovic to speak out against the war. He changes the subject and brings up their high school prom and how he ran through the rain just to dance with and kiss her before leaving for basic training. Following a World War II love story narrative, Kovic says that he made a promise to himself that he would come back and love her forever. The young woman seems ambivalent about his confession and one of her friends quickly interrupts them. As they stop outside a building, she half-heartedly invites him inside as he sits in his wheelchair beside the curb looking up at the many

---

[387] *Hamburger Hill*.

94

steps. His physical limitations along with their different views of the war prove to be symbolic barriers to their relationship.

In contrast to World War II films, women are largely absent in the reintegration process for returning Vietnam War veterans. Men are portrayed as the primary enablers in veterans' adjustment. In *Born on the Fourth of July*, Kovic struggles not only with his physical disabilities suffered in war, but also coming to terms with his service. When he first arrives back at his parents' house, his father gives him a tour and tells him all the improvements he has made to accommodate his wheelchair. In a tender moment in Ron's room, his father leans down to give him a hug and says it is good to have him back. No such emotional interaction is seen with his mother who encouraged him to serve. After a night of hard drinking with a high school friend, he comes home and belligerently yells at his parents. His mother—initially his biggest supporter—chastises him for being drunk again. He pulls out his catheter in anger. His father carries him to his bedroom and gently fixes his catheter. Although silent or ambivalent about his son's war service, Kovic's father provides physical and emotional support to his son.

In another scene, another veteran serves to help Kovic come to terms with his experience. He befriends a man in a community of disabled veterans in Mexico. The two get into a fight and knock each other out of their wheel chairs. Ron sobs, "I had a mother and father. I had things, things that made sense. Remember things that made sense? Things you could count on. Before we all got so lost."[388] The implied message in both scenes is that only other men can help each other reintegrate back into society and come to terms with their experiences.

---

[388] *Born on the Fourth of July*.

The theme of silent fathers of the World War II generation and the complicated relationships with their sons is prevalent in all of the films. These older men failed in their duty of passing on lessons and helping to initiate their sons into manhood. The adopted father-son relationships found in combat supplant the biological father-son relationships at home, but even these relationships are complicated. Bonding rituals are important and help cement these relationships between men. However, often the fighting within the groups of American soldiers occupies more screen-time than actual combat with the enemy. Men in the films continually struggle to define their relationships with each other, along with their own identities. Overwhelmingly, the films portray women negatively. Women are depicted as sources of tension between men, and even harmful to men.

<div align="center">Defining Masculinity by Others</div>

Part of the transformation process of becoming a man happens in the form of defining masculinity. Defining masculinity by way of comparison is common, in general, and is seen in the films. Masculinity is defined in opposition to the enemy, racial minorities, homosexuals, and most significantly, women. This phenomenon is depicted with the deconstruction of men in basic training and interactions with fellow soldiers once in combat. *Full Metal Jacket* explicitly portrays this occurrence in the first part of the film. Recruits are routinely called "faggot," "ladies," and many other names as punishment for not performing to standard.[389] Men are self-regulating and endlessly observe each other. The unconscious effect is to train the men specifically to not be any

---

[389] *Full Metal Jacket.*

of those other things. However, several films also investigate the complicated duality of man with characters who exhibit both masculine and feminine traits. *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket* explicitly explore the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity and the plurality of masculinity. These complex characters reveal the continually blurred lines separating masculinity and femininity, and men's struggle to identify successful models of manhood.

The enemy is typically dehumanized to construct the identity of the American soldier, especially in regards to masculinity. The way American service members talk about the Vietnamese in the films shows this construction or dehumanization. In *Casualties of War*, a soldier is upset about the death of a fellow soldier. He rages, "These fucking gooks are shit man. They're lowlifes. . . . They're slugs, man. They're roaches. Total fucking destruction is the only way to deal with them."[390] All of these terms are used across the films to describe the enemy. Ironically, *Hamburger Hill* presents a scene that shows respect for the American soldiers' adversary. The squad leader, Franz, lectures a group of new soldiers, "Now forget about this Viet Cong shit. What you encounter out there is hardcore NVA. North Vietnamese, motivated, highly-trained, well-equipped."[391] The films show that the enemy is not the primary target for defining masculinity by opposition.

Despite the well-documented social issues during the 1960s and 1970s, race relations are barely explored within the films. All of the main characters in the films are white men. Black characters are either portrayed in a neutral or slightly negative light.

---

[390] *Casualties of War.*

[391] *Hamburger Hill.*

Additionally, the few representative black characters are also more likely to die in the films than their white counterparts are. Their minor appearances in the films convey the message of a white male focused masculinity. *Platoon's* representations of black soldiers are less than exemplary. The film contains a young looking black soldier, Junior, who is perpetually whining. In an attempt to damage the skin on his feet, and thus get out of combat, he sprays mosquito repellant on his wet feet. This same soldier also falsely blamed Taylor for falling asleep on an ambush that led to a firefight. Additionally, after the last scene of fighting, one black soldier stabbed himself with a bayonet when he hears reinforcements arriving. He purposely wounds himself to cover up the fact that he was hiding in a foxhole during the entire fight. *Hamburger Hill* depicts a black soldier, "Doc," who struggles to contain his emotions.[392] He blames the squad leader for a fellow black soldier's death. The soldier only had a short time left in country and Doc was upset because he was put on point during a patrol. The implication is that longevity in theater may be more important than race. *Full Metal Jacket's* basic training scenes offer plenty of instances of racial slurs and bigotry. The drill instructor insults a recruit because of his race. He gives the recruit a racist nickname "Private Snowball" and evokes a racial stereotype by saying: "Well there's one thing you won't like Private Snowball. They don't serve fried chicken and watermelon on a daily basis in my mess hall."[393] Black recruits are targeted, but then again, the drill instructor attacks all of the recruits for any number of differences.

---

[392] *Hamburger Hill.*

[393] *Full Metal Jacket.*

98

Accusations of homosexuality, with its perceived connection to femininity, are a particularly common way to deconstruct the recruits and control men's actions in combat. The drill instructor in *Full Metal Jacket* attacks the men with a barrage of accusations about their sexuality. He asks one recruit where he is from. The recruit responds, "Texas."[394] The drill instructor exclaims,

> Holy dog shit, Texas? Only steers and queers come from Texas, Private Cowboy. And you don't look much like a steer to me so that kinda narrows it down. Do you suck dicks? . . . Are you a peterpuffer? . . . I'll bet you're the kind of guy that would fuck a person in the ass and not even have the goddamn common courtesy to give him a reach around. I'll be watching you.[395]

The drill instructor moves to another recruit and asks, "Do you suck dicks?"[396] The recruit replies in the negative. The drill instructor responds, "Bullshit. I bet you could suck a golf ball through a garden hose."[397] He then goes on to criticize the recruit's first name, "Lawrence."[398] He claims, "Only faggots and sailors are called Lawrence. From now on you're Private Gomer Pyle."[399] The drill instructor's verbal abuse specifically constructs masculinity in opposition to homosexuality. In *Platoon,* O'Neil hides behind a dead body in the last firefight of the film. When reinforcements arrive, he blames his fellow soldiers for leaving him, "Yea, bunch of fucking faggots, they all left me."[400] In

---

[394] *Full Metal Jacket*.

[395] Ibid.

[396] Ibid.

[397] Ibid.

[398] Ibid.

[399] Ibid.

[400] *Platoon*.

99

truth, his own cowardice is the only reason he is still alive. The real men, who fought and stood their ground, died.

The two films that contain rape scenes, *Casualties of War* and *Platoon*, show how men's accusations of homosexuality attempt to control the behaviors of other men. Eriksson, in *Casualties of War*, refuses to participate in the rape of a young Vietnamese woman. His team leader, Sarge, questions his masculinity and sexuality to try to coerce him to participate. He grills Eriksson, "Well, what's the matter? Don't you like girls? Haven't you got a pair, is that your problem?"[401] Clark, another soldier in the team, states, "Maybe he's queer."[402] Sarge continues his barrage, "Maybe he is a queer. Maybe Eriksson's a homosexual. We got us two girls on our patrol."[403] During the middle of this dialogue, he turns to the other men and imitates a blowjob by pretending to suck the end of his rifle. The same accusation of homosexuality is targeted at Taylor when he stops a group of soldiers from raping a young woman during the village scene. Bunny questions him, "Are you a homosexual Taylor?"[404] The implication is that violence against women, specifically Vietnamese women, is acceptable. The masculinity of any man who does not participate is questioned.

The films most vehemently depict the construction of masculinity against women and in opposition to femininity. Similar to homosexuality, accusations of femininity serve to both enforce and discourage certain behaviors and actions. Vietnamese women are the

---

[401] *Casualties of War.*

[402] Ibid.

[403] Ibid.

[404] *Platoon.*

only women portrayed in the films. They are dehumanized and reduced to mere sexual beings. The films show that women are often a source of tension among men. Unlike World War II films, these films do not show any significant love interests. The message is that women seem to abandon their roles of providing support from home.

The basic training scenes in *Full Metal Jacket* are full of sexist comments with the drill instructor calling the men "ladies" and demanding they "sound off like you got a pair."[405] The drill instructor makes the recruits give their rifles female names. He explains:

> Tonight you pukes will sleep with your rifles. You will give your rifle a girl's name, because this is the only pussy you people are going to get. Your days of finger banging old Mary Jane Rotten Crotch through her pretty pink panties are over. You're married to this piece, this weapon of iron and wood. You will be faithful.[406]

The rifle symbolically replaces the men's relationships with women. The transference of femininity to the rifle, which is also a means of violence, is noteworthy. A later scene in the film shows the recruits marching in their barracks room. The drill instructor leads the men in a chant, "This is my rifle (both hands on rifle), this is my gun (grabs crotch). This is for fighting (both hands on rifle), this is for fun (grabs crotch)."[407] The message is that both the rifle and the male penis are both instruments to accomplish actions, and they are extensions of male power, or masculinity.

The dehumanization of Vietnamese women is shown in the scene with the female sniper in *Full Metal Jacket* and the rape scenes in *Casualties of War* and *Platoon*. The

---

[405] *Full Metal Jacket.*

[406] Ibid.

[407] Ibid.

sniper in *Full Metal Jacket* is depicted as little more than a sexual being. After Rafterman

shoots her, the squad members gather around her. One of the men remarks, "No more

boom boom for this baby-san."[408] Joker is then pressured to shoot the sniper. Despite the

fact that she single-handedly decimated most of the squad, she is only recognized as a

woman. In their eyes, she is no different from any of the other Vietnamese prostitutes the

men frequent. In *Casualties of War*, Sarge plans and conducts a kidnapping of a young

woman from a Vietnamese village. The recent death of a fellow soldier upset him and the

team's cancelled pass into town to visit prostitutes exacerbates the situation. The men

seize several women in a small hut. Sarge tells one of the men to take the "pretty one."[409]

Clark tells Eriksson, who is visibly uncomfortable, "We're going to win her heart and

mind Eriksson, if she's got one."[410] His comment suggests the woman is not even human.

After the team members rape the young women, Clark asks Sarge when was the last time

he had a "real woman."[411] Sarge replies, "She was real. I think she was real."[412] During

the rape scene in *Platoon,* one of the soldiers asks Taylors, "What the fuck is your

problem Taylor, she's a fucking dink!"[413] Taylor responds, "She's a fucking human being

man."[414] Taylor calls the group of men animals. One of the men spits on him and says,

---

[408] *Full Metal Jacket.*

[409] *Casualties of War.*

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid.

[412] Ibid.

[413] *Platoon.*

[414] Ibid.

"You don't belong in the 'Nam."[415] Similarly, Eriksson's fellow team members in *Casualties of War* shun him for not participating in the rape of a young woman.

Several films reveal the complex connections between femininity and masculinity. Barnes and Elias represent the duality of man, but they also individually possess both feminine and masculine characteristics. Barnes may be brutal, but he has kept his men alive and protected them. Elias is more humane, but is a very effective killer when required. The two men's contempt for each other reaches a climax over a situation in a village that spirals out of control. Barnes went on a rampage out of anger after recently losing a soldier. He orders the men to round up all the villagers and attempts to interrogate one older man. The man's wife tries to intervene and Barnes shoots her in the head. He then grabs a small child and holds a gun to her head in an attempt to get information out of the old man. Elias arrives and hits Barnes with the butt of his rifle to stop him.

During a firefight after the event in the village, Elias goes out with a few other men to roll up the flank of the North Vietnamese Army. He aligns the men in their positions and then leaves to pull security on their flanks. Taylor asks if he can go with him, but Elias replies that he moves faster alone. He is then shown deftly darting through the jungle like a lone hunter. Barnes meets up with the men and tells them to go back. He says he will find Elias. He takes off into the jungle, seemingly to hunt down Elias. He finds Elias in a small clearing and smirks before shooting him. He later lies to the other men and tells them he found him dead. As the men are air lifted out of the area on a helicopter, Elias is seen running from the jungle with North Vietnamese Army chasing

---

[415] *Platoon.*

103

after him. He is shot multiple times, attempts to keep running, but finally falls dead.

Taylor glares at Barnes in the helicopter because he now knows he lied about finding

Elias already dead. In the last firefight of the film, Taylor finds Barnes injured and trying

to crawl to help. Barnes orders him, "Get me a medic. Go on boy."[416] Taylor raises his

weapon and Barnes challenges him, "Do it."[417] Taylor shoots Barnes and kills him.

Symbolically, Barnes killed the feminine in the form of Elias and Taylor killed the

masculine in the form of Barnes.

This duality of man is also seen in *Full Metal Jacket*, first in Joker and then in the

form of the character nicknamed Animal Mother. Joker takes on the role of helper to the

unfortunate Gomer Pyle in basic training. Joker is patient and calm with him, helping him

practice drill and put together his weapon. This reveals a softer, more feminine side of

Joker. Later in the film, Joker wears a peace symbol on his vest and the phrase Born to

Kill on his helmet. His patient assistance to Pyle supports the peace symbol. However,

his hesitation in shooting the sniper contradicts the symbolism of the Born to Kill phrase.

When a senior ranking officer asks what the two symbols mean together, Joker explains

that he is trying to suggest something about the "duality of man."[418] The older officer

does not understand what he is referring to and asks him whose side is he on and to get

with the program. Implied is the difference in generational understandings of masculinity.

Animal Mother is a muscle bound member of the squad who carries the largest

weapon and wears rounds of ammunition crisscrossed over both shoulders. He resembles

---

[416] *Platoon.*

[417] Ibid.

[418] *Full Metal Jacket.*

a GI Joe figure or toned down version of the character John Rambo in the film *Rambo*. Except, instead of being an individual man of war, he becomes the savior of the squad. His concern for the welfare of his fellow Marines tempers his apparent aggressive nature. Sniper fire pins down the squad in Hue city and several wounded Marines are out in the open. The squad is denied tank support and the new squad leader—Cowboy—orders the men to pull out of the area. Animal Mother refuses to leave the fallen men and after hearing the sniper shoot one of them again, he screams, "Fuck you Cowboy, fuck all you assholes."[419] He takes off on his own to try to save the wounded men. Animal Mother represents actual feminine and masculine characteristics while Joker suggests them metaphorically with the symbols he wears.

The films show a definition of white male masculinity in opposition to others in the form of the enemy, black soldiers, homosexuals, and women. Homosexuality and femininity are especially depicted as contradictory to the achievement of masculinity. However, the portrayal of Elias and Animal Mother reveals a complicated reading of the masculine and feminine dichotomy. These two characters exhibit both masculinity in their killing prowess and femininity in their care for other men. Joker espouses to have both masculine and feminine characteristics, but his actions do not support it. The simultaneous plurality of masculinity and dichotomy between masculinity and femininity that Barnes and Elias offer in *Platoon* is rejected with the symbolic killing of both.

The films, then, propose a critique of the notion that a monolithic masculinity, reminiscent of the World War II generation, actually exists. The films show men's impossible predicament; there is no right way to be a man. The construction of

---

[419] *Full Metal Jacket*.

masculinity occurs not only in behaviors, but also in the physical depiction of bodies within the films. Femininity, especially in the *Full Metal Jacket* basic training scenes, is routinely beaten, both physically and metaphorically, out of the men.

Physical Body

One of the most common, stable characteristics of masculinity is the male body. Basic training scenes show the transformation of the male body into a disciplined, strong fighting machine. The films show the importance of the physical body in terms of proving masculinity through the exhibition of discipline and pushing through pain. They also reveal that certain male bodies count as more masculine than others do. Failure to perform physically is punished—often violently—by other men. In war, the male body itself becomes a weapon, not only against the enemy, but against women as well. *Platoon* and *Casualties of War* show the rape of Vietnamese women. The men pressure each other into the act and their penises literally become weapons during the act. Construction of these physical bodies is critiqued in all of the films.

Full Metal Jacket traces the physical transformation of a group of young men during basic training. The men are put through exhausting drills, runs, and pushups. One recruit, Private Pyle, cannot keep up with the other men. Pyle is overweight and out of shape. He cannot do any pull-ups and fails to complete obstacle courses. The drill instructor repeatedly calls him "fatbody" and humiliates him in front of the other recruits.[420] Another soldier, Gardner,—in *Platoon*—is ridiculed for his physical stature. During the film's first ambush scene, Gardner is shot in the chest and dies before he can

---

[420] *Full Metal Jacket.*

be medically evacuated. Barnes callously uses the new guy as an example, "You all take a good look at this lump of shit. Remember what it looks like. You fuck up in a firefight and I goddamn guarantee you a trip out of the bush in a body bag."[421] He is completely insensitive about the man's death and attributes it to his weight. The message is that real soldiers and, thus, real men are physically fit. Unfit or overweight men do not survive Vietnam and certainly do not attain manhood.

Born on the Fourth of July shows the physical construction of Kovic's body that later prepares him for service in the Marines. The film shows a scene of him in high school as a member of the varsity wrestling team. His practices are uncannily run like basic training with exhausting drills, and the coach screaming at the boys like a drill instructor might verbally abuse recruits. The coach bellows, "I want you to kill, do you hear me? . . . Get your ass up ladies."[422] Kovic's discipline is shown as he pushes himself during practice and then later when he returns home and refuses dinner because he needs to lose three pounds before that weekend's match. This insistence on pushing through the pain and discipline is echoed in *Platoon*. After an ambush, an injured soldier cries out in pain. Barnes comes over and clamps his hand over the man's mouth and yells, "Shut up. Shut up and take the pain."[423] Barnes' face is littered with scars, it is clear that he knows what it is like to experience pain. The man immediately calms down.

Kovic's discipline carries over into his service in Vietnam and ultimately leads to his paralysis. During a firefight, he is shot in the foot. Instead of lying down and waiting

---

[421] *Platoon*.

[422] *Born on the Fourth of July*.

[423] *Platoon*.

107

for a medic, he continues to move forward and shoot at the enemy. As a result, he is shot

multiple more times. He later recounts the experience to a childhood friend:

> I got shot in the foot and I just got up running around like I was back in the woods
> again, like I was John fucking Wayne or something. Emptying a mag screaming
> c'mon Charlie, motherfucker c'mon out . . . I was so stupid. I have my dick and
> my balls now and I think, I think Timmy I'd give everything I believe in.
> Everything I got, all my values just to have my body back again. Just to be whole
> again. But I'm not whole, I never will be and that's the way it is, isn't it.[424]

His confession reveals the naivety in his belief of World War II myths and his own

youthful invincibility. His experience contradicts the narrative of war service as a viable

path to manhood. When the doctor tells him that he is paralyzed from the mid-chest down

and will be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life, Kovic does not believe him. The doctor

also tells Kovic that he will not be able to have children, another blow to his already

complicated masculinity. During his rehabilitation, he works extremely hard to try to gain

back control over his legs, but the ingrained lessons from his high school wrestling days

do not work anymore. He ends up falling off his crutches and breaking his thighbone,

setting back his rehabilitation. He stays in bed for four months to try to save his broken

leg, an effort that is further complicated when the drainage pumps breaks. The doctor

tries to convince him to have the leg amputated, but Kovic vehemently opposes this

action. Even if his legs do not work, it is important to him to keep his body as whole as

possible.

Naivety regarding the resiliency of male bodies is also shown in *Casualties of

War* when a wounded soldier, "Brownie," is medically evacuated after being shot in the

---

[424] *Born on the Fourth of July*.

neck.[425] As he is lifted into the helicopter, he repeatedly proclaims, "I'm an armor plated motherfucker!"[426] His proclamation conveys a belief that his physical body is indestructible. The men in Brownie's team later find out that he died.

A reading of the construction of two of the films' antagonists reveals a critique of the hypermasculinity of the 1980s. Both Barnes in *Platoon* and Sarge in *Casualties of War* are constructed as muscular, ultra aggressive men. These men play by their own rules and exhibit bravado in their actions, albeit toned down compared to the *Rambo* films. Barnes has countless scars across his face, back, and chest. He fearlessly walks through a firefight upright without flinching. One of the soldiers in the platoon remarks, "Barnes been shot seven times and he ain't dead. Does that mean anything to you, huh? Barnes ain't meant to die. They only thing that could kill Barnes is Barnes."[427] Similarly, Sarge is a veteran whose men both fear and are in awe of him. One of his soldiers compares him to Genghis Khan in admiration following their kidnapping of the Vietnamese women. After Sarge rapes the women, he comes out of the hut with muscles bulging and sweat glistening on his chest. Both men ultimately meet their demise at the hands of seemingly less physically masculine men. Taylor kills Barnes and Sarge is sentenced to jail after Eriksson implicates him in the rape and murder of the Vietnamese women.

The depiction of men's physical bodies as means of violence, particularly against women, is portrayed in *Casualties of War* and *Platoon*. As mentioned previously, the

---

[425] *Casualties of War.*

[426] Ibid.

[427] *Platoon.*

team members in *Casualties of War* kidnap a young Vietnamese woman from a village. They take her with them on a long-range patrol with the express purpose of raping her. Sarge tries to force Eriksson to take part in the rape, but he refuses. Frustrated, Sarge replies, "Well maybe when I'm done with her, I'm going to come after you. Maybe when I'm done humping her, I'm going to come hump you."[428] Eriksson points his weapon at Sarge to which Sarge responds, "You going to take an attack posture with me? (throws his own rifle at Eriksson) Yea you got a weapon. Clark's got a weapon, Clark's got a knife. We all got weapons."[429] Sarge takes his weapon back from Eriksson. He then declares, "The Army calls this a weapon, but it ain't."[430] He recites the same basic training chant that is shown in *Full Metal Jacket* except he reverses the symbolic roles of the weapon and penis: "This is a weapon (grabs crotch), this is a gun (holds up rifle). This is for fighting (grabs crotch), this is for fun (holds up rifle)."[431] Sarge then goes into the hut and rapes the young woman. The implication is that the penis is a symbolic weapon of violence to be used against women. The violence against the woman culminates with all of the men in the team, except Eriksson, contributing to her murder. Clark stabs her multiple times and the rest of the men shoot her when she tries to escape.

Eriksson and another team member, Diaz, express their disapproval and reluctance to participate in rape from the moment the men kidnap the woman. When Eriksson questions what they are doing with the girl, Sarge states that she is a VC [Viet

---

[428] *Casualties of War*.

[429] Ibid.

[430] Ibid.

[431] Ibid.

Cong] whore and they're going to have a little fun with her. Eriksson knows she is not

part of the Viet Cong and objects that she is just a farm girl. Sarge then grabs the girl and

says, "Now this is a VC . . . And you, I don't know about."[432] He then asks Eriksson how

the team is going to be able to count on him. He states flatly, "You could get killed real

easy, don't you know that. Somebody stumbles, they don't mean to shoot you."[433] The

message is that by going against the group, Eriksson is also the enemy. The men must be

united in their violence against the woman. Diaz eventually acquiesces and ends up

raping the woman along with the rest of the men. During the rape and murder trial, Diaz

explained his involvement:

> When you go out on patrol, Sir, you're not going to be as good as you want to be
> because these guys aren't helping you do anything. There's going to be four
> people on that patrol and an individual. So I did what I did and I got remorse
> about it. But I also got remorse about talking at this trial too. 'Cuz I have a loyalty
> to the men I was out there with.[434]

Diaz simultaneously blames his actions on the other men and yet avows his loyalty to

them. This contradiction highlights the complexity of these men's relationships. They

cannot trust each other, but must rely on each other for survival. Taylor is more

successful in his efforts to stop the men in his platoon from raping a Vietnamese woman

than Eriksson was in his team. However, both Taylor and Eriksson are physically

threatened and have their masculinity questioned for their refusal to participate in the

rapes.

---

[432] *Casualties of War*.

[433] Ibid.

[434] Ibid.

The threat of physical violence for non-conformity is also evident in *Full Metal Jacket*. The sources of violence for non-conformity come from both the drill instructor and other recruits. In the opening scene of *Full Metal Jacket*, while the drill instructor is disparaging another recruit, Joker makes the smart aleck comment, "Is that you John Wayne? Is this me?"[435] This outburst immediately draws the drill instructor's ire. He runs over to the other side of the barracks room demanding to know who spoke. When Joker admits he was the culprit, the drill instructor punches him in the stomach. While he is on the ground, the drill instructor warns him, "You will not laugh, you will not cry, you will learn by the numbers. I will teach you. Now get up, get on your feet. You had best unfuck yourself or I will unscrew your head and shit down your neck."[436] The drill instructor's rage finds a new victim when Private Pyle is unable to stop grinning. The drill instructor forces Pyle to place his neck in the drill instructor's hand, thus allowing himself to be choked. The drill instructor threatens him, "You had best square your ass away and start shedding me Tiffany's cuff links or I will definitely fuck you up."[437]

In another scene, Pyle confuses his left and right in a drill movement and the drill instructor slaps one side of his face and then the other to teach Pyle his left from his right. The drill instructor tells the platoon that they will be punished for Pyle's continued mistakes because they have not given him the proper motivation. Fed up with being punished because of him, the recruits perform a blanket party on Pyle in the middle of the night. A blanket party is a form of physically violent peer pressure. When one member is

---

[435] *Full Metal Jacket*.

[436] Ibid.

[437] Ibid.

not pulling his load, the other men beat him in an attempt to get him to improve. All of the men in the platoon take their turns beating Pyle with bars of soap wrapped in towels. The last one to go, Joker, is conflicted because he tried to help Pyle. Cowboy has to pressure him, "Do it, do it."[438] Joker then hits him six times, instead of once like all the other men, to take out his frustration. Pyle is viciously punished for standing out, being different, and not conforming.

The representation of physical bodies and the physical performance of masculinity in the films suggest a complicated reading of men's bodies. Men demonstrate their masculinity with not only the physical composition of their bodies, but also with how these bodies are used. The films show that men who do not conform, either physically or with the physical use of their bodies, are punished. Men whose bodies do not meet certain standards of masculinity, such as Pyle and Gardner, fail to survive. Conversely, the men who exhibit hypermasculinity in both their physique and behavior, such as Barnes and Sarge, do not survive either, at least symbolically.

Analysis of these films through a lens of masculinity norms reveals the many contradictions and complications of American masculinity. Through the norms of becoming a man, relationships, defining masculinity by others and the physical body the films reveal critiques of national myths of masculinity. The films show that World War II myths of American heroism and achieving manhood through combat influenced many of the characters. These men were met with a harsh reality in Vietnam as these myths proved nothing more than boyhood fantasies. The Vietnam War was not the war their fathers fought in, and mere survival replaced heroism as a goal for most men. The war

---

[438] *Full Metal Jacket*.

service path to manhood also proves to be a false narrative. Not all men survive the transformation process and those who do are forced to rely on other men. The importance of these relationships is emphasized, while the disunity of the men is simultaneously criticized. The films highlight the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity symbolically in several characters. A monolithic masculinity is rejected, but the films show that there is no clear way to be a real man. Despite the great divide depicted between men and women in the films, several characters offer redemption for the majority of the male characters' sexist or violent behavior against women. Taylor stops his platoon from raping a woman, but he is also responsible for the death of Barnes. Eriksson attempts, but fails to stop his team from raping and killing a young woman. Ultimately, he cannot protect her and his actions compromise the bonds with his fellow soldiers. The films expose a continuing crisis of masculinity that questions manhood models from World War II while also critiquing the emergence of a 1980s hypermasculinity.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

> I think now looking back, we did not fight the enemy, we fought
> ourselves. The enemy was in us. The war is over for me now, but it will always be
> there, the rest of my days. As I'm sure Elias will be, fighting with Barnes for what
> Rhah called "possession of my soul." There are times since I've felt like a child,
> born of those two fathers. But be that as it may, those of us who did make it have
> an obligation to build again. To teach to others what we know, and to try with
> what's left of our lives to find a goodness and a meaning to this life.
> —Oliver Stone, dir., *Platoon*

Films tell audiences stories. These stories often expose period specific cultural

anxieties and issues. Vietnam War films made during 1986 to 1989 tell stories not only

about the war experience, but narratives that reveal societal perceptions of masculinity

relevant to the eighties. The films expose continued anxiety regarding the status of

masculinity, especially white male masculinity. As discussed in chapter 2, the crisis of

masculinity is ubiquitous throughout American history. Looking beyond just the Vietnam

War era enables a deeper and more complete understanding of the performance of

masculinity in the films. Certainly, the turmoil stemming from the socially explosive

1960s and 1970s period is evident. The reactions to efforts in the early 1980s to counter

this crisis are also apparent. The films critique the Reagan-era resurrection of myths of

stable masculinity from the post-World War II era and proliferation of a compensatory

hypermasculinity.

The fervor created by Reagan and conservatives and the need for restoration of

American men's confidence due to Vietnam and the social movements of the sixties and

seventies led to the initial embracement of these resurrected myths and hypermasculinity.

A simple 1950s-model monolithic masculinity was a concept that American men could

accept and wanted to believe existed. Good," quickly winnable wars were sought in places like Central America to redeem the military's performance in Vietnam.[439] Revisionist narratives such as the *Rambo* films transferred responsibility for Vietnam from the military and individual soldier to the government's bureaucracy and deceitful authority. However, cultural memory failed to remember that this so-called stable ideal of masculinity did not make men happy and that the myths of World War II failed in Vietnam. The films capture these culturally specific responses to shifting masculinity in society and critique the revival of shallow post-World War II myths and model of masculinity to address the 1980s masculinity crisis. Mythologizing World War II heroism and war service while promoting aggressive masculinity did not solve men's problems and ultimately turned out to be a façade.

All of the films question the myths of the American hero and serving in a war to become a man. *Full Metal Jacket* levels the harshest criticism against these myths and shows that not all men make it through basic training, let alone a tour of duty in Vietnam. Survival of either experience does not ensure the attainment of manhood. Indeed, the experience of combat is depicted as one of survival, not only against the enemy but fellow American men. The transformation process promised to young men through war service does not materialize. References to the silent fathers of the World War II generation symbolize the criticism leveled at a 1950s model of masculinity and fathers' failure to initiate their sons into manhood. These fathers' failure to talk to their sons and pass on their own war experiences are found in *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Platoon*, and *Hamburger Hill*. Men's relationships with women also appear fractured. Most damning,

---

[439] Palmer, 21.

however, is men's relationships with each other. These relationships are the most important in proving and attaining manhood. The films show that men fail each other.

In opposition to a stable monolithic masculinity, the films depict the complicated plurality of masculinity. The films show the consistent process of defining masculinity against others. Masculinity is defined most vehemently in opposition to femininity in the form of homosexuality and women. *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket* explore of the duality of man and the struggle men experience in finding successful models of manhood. The visual performance of masculinity through portrayals of the male body is also complicated. The films critique both characters who exhibit hypermasculinity in terms of muscular bodies and violent and aggressive use of those bodies, and characters who exhibit more stereotypical feminine characteristics such as weakness and restraint. The films show the catch-22 men experience in terms of defining their own masculinity with their behaviors and physical actions.

The epigraph specifically addresses the complicated issues facing men in the films. *Platoon's* Taylor delivers these lines at the end of the film. The quote highlights three important points: the harmfulness of men fighting each other, the plurality of masculinity, and the importance of men teaching and helping each other as a potential resolution to the masculinity crisis. The key to resolving this crisis, then, lies within men.

Arguably, the complex issues involving masculinity, and the lessons learned from the Vietnam War still apply. Contemporary social turmoil echoes change experienced during the 1960s and 1970s and the backlash experienced in the 1980s. The drive for the expansion of rights and protections of racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and women continues. Race and class issues continue to exist in American society. The killings of

117

Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray—all young black men—and the

ensuing riots highlight these tensions.[440] Gay and lesbian American citizens are

increasingly visible in society with the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act and a

federal decision on gay marriage that as of the writing of this thesis is currently at the

Supreme Court.[441] Gay marriage directly challenges traditional gender roles, especially in

gay male couples, which complicates views of masculinity.

The military, especially, has experienced significant change in the past decade.

The repeal of Defense of Marriage Act paved the way for the military to allow gays and

lesbians to serve openly. The repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and openly

gay and lesbian service members challenge views of military masculinity.[442] Visibility of

transgender service members has increased as well with Chelsea Manning receiving

---

[440] Dan Barry, Serge F. Kovaleski, Campbell Robertson, and Lizette Alvarez, "Race, Tragedy, and Outrage Collide After a Shot in Florida," *New York Times,* April 1, 2012, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-prompts-a-review-of-ideals.html; Frances Robles and Julie Bosman, "Autopsy Shows Michael Brown Was Struck at Least 6 Times," *New York Times,* August, 19, 2014, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/18/us/michael-brown-autopsy-shows-he-was-shot-at-least-6-times.html; Benjamin Mueller and John Surico, "Over 140 Arrested as New Yorkers Protest the Death of Freddie Gray," *New York Times,* April 30, 2015, accessed May 4 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/30/nyregion/hundreds-march-in-manhattan-to-protest-the-death-of-freddie-gray.html.

[441] John Schwartz, "Between the Lines of the Defense of Marriage Act Opinion," *New York Times,* June 26, 2013, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/06/26/us/annotated-supreme-court-decision-on-doma.html; Adam Liptak, "Gay Marriage Arguments Divide Supreme Court Justices," *New York Times,* April 28, 2015, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/29/us/supreme-court-same-sex-marriage.html?gwh=EFB14AC7849B484B5318175486803FAB&gwt=pay&assetType=nyt_now.

[442] Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Obama Signs Away 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,'" *New York Times,* December 22, 2010, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/29/us/supreme-court-same-sex-marriage.html?gwh=EFB14AC7849B484B5318175486803FAB&gwt=pay&assetType=nyt_now.

government-supported hormone therapy.[443] Transgender individuals in particular

challenge views of masculinity. Female to male transgender individuals directly

challenge the last frontier of masculinity—the male body—exposing masculinity's

precariousness.[444] The opening of previously closed combat arms positions to women in

the military also threatens masculinity.[445] As of the writing of this thesis, the first cohort

of women are taking part in the Army's storied Ranger School.[446] Part of the debate

surrounding women's presence in combat arms units and attendance at this elite school

concerns the importance of maintaining the physical performance standards. This

supports the role of the physical body as the final separating factor between men and

women. Contemporary backlash against the expansion of social rights is visible through

the reversal of abortion rights for women at both the state and federal levels.[447]

---

[443] Tom Vanden Brook, "Military Approves Hormone Therapy for Chelsea Manning," *USA Today,* February 13, 2015, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.usatoday. com/story/news/nation/2015/02/12/chelsea-manning-hormone-therapy/23311813/.

[444] One example is Sergeant Shane Ortega, who was born a female and now lives as a male. His situation is explained in Juliet Eilperin's article in the *Washington Post*, "Transgender in the Military: A Pentagon in Transition Weights its Policy," April 9, 2015, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transgender-in-the-military-a-pentagon-in-transition-weighs-its-policy/2015/04/09/ee0ca39e-cf0d-11e4-8c54-ffb5ba6f2f69_story.html.

[445] C. Todd Lopez and Julia Henning, "Arms Describes Integrating Women into Combat," *Army Times,* June 18, 2013, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.army.mil/ article/105814/.

[446] Jim Michaels, "Army Opens Legendary Ranger School to Women," *USA Today,* January 15, 2015, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/ nation/2015/01/15/combat-women-army-ranger-school/21814747/.

[447] Heather D. Boonstra and Elizabeth Nash,"A Surge of State Abortion Restrictions Puts Providers—and the Women They Serve—in the Crosshairs," *Guttmacher Policy Review* 17, no. 1 (Winter 2014), accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/17/1/gpr170109.html; Deidre Walsh, "House Passes

Additionally, the Men's Movement that began in the late 1970s has gained momentum within the past decade. Several men's rights groups oppose the notion of male power in society, changing roles of women, and the feminization of education.[448] The effects of this more recent social change and resistance are yet to be seen within American society.

The Afghanistan and Iraq Wars also relate to the Vietnam War in terms of extended wars of choice with ambiguous outcomes. Films have yet to make substantial commentary on the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. The majority of the films released so far—*Hurt Locker* (2008), *Lone Survivor* (2013), and *American Sniper* (2014) focus on a specific aspect of the war (improvised explosive devices in *Hurt Locker*) or are biographical narratives of historical events (*Lone Survivor* and *American Sniper*). The individual experiences of the common service member have yet to be fully explored. All of these films are male centric and seem to ignore the vastly increased presence of women on the battlefield. Issues of masculinity, especially in relation to current events, are also not portrayed. Time will tell what stories will be told about the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars through film and what these stories will say about masculinity. This study provides a contextual framework for analyzing masculinity in war films and understanding the evolving nature of masculinity over time.

Bill Banning Abortions After 20 Weeks," *CNN,* May 14, 2015, accessed May 16, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/13/politics/house-gop-abortion-20-weeks/.

[448] Jessica Roy, "What I Learned as a Women at a Men's Rights Conference," *Time*, July 2, 2014, accessed May 4, 2015, http://time.com/2949435/what-i-learned-as-a-woman-at-a-mens-rights-conference/.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Auster, Albert, and Leonard Quart. *How the War was Remembered: Hollywood and Vietnam*. New York: Praeger, 1988.

Bates, Milton J. *The Wars We Took to Vietnam*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1996.

Beattie, Keith. *The Scar that Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Belkin, Aaron. *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire, 1898-2001*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Bell, Coral. *The Reagan Paradox: U.S. Foreign Policy in the 1980s*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989.

Bertram, Christoph. *America's Security in the 1980s*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.

Blake, Linnie. *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma, and National Identity*. United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2012.

Bly, Robert. *Iron John: A Book About Men*. Boston, MA: De Capo Press, 2004.

Boggs, Carl, and Tom Pollard. *The Hollywood War Machine: U.S. Militarism and Popular Culture*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Pub, 2007.

Boyle, Brenda M. *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2009.

Burgoyne, Robert. *The Hollywood Historical Film*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

_____. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Capps, Walter H. *The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1982.

Chambers, John Whiteclay, and David Culbert. *World War II, Film, and History*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Chambers, Samuel A. *The Queer Politics of Television*. London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2009.

Chapman, James. *War and Film*. London, England: Reaktion, 2008.

Chopra-Gant, Mike. *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America: Masculinity, Family, and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir*. London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2006.

Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Penguin Group, 2005.

Coyne, Michael. *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western*. London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 1998.

Derosa, Chris. *Political Indoctrination in the U.S. Army from World War II to the Vietnam War*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

Devine, Jeremy M. *Vietnam at 24 frames a Second: A Critical and Thematic Analysis of Over 400 Films About the Vietnam War*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995.

Dittmar, Linda, and Gene Michaud. *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Doherty, Thomas. *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Donald, Ralph, and Karen MacDonald. *Reel Men at War: Masculinity and the American War Film*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011.

Eberwein, Robert T. *Armed Forces: Masculinity and Sexuality in the American War Film*. Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

_____. *The Hollywood War Film*. Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2010.

Elshtain, Jean B. *Women and War*. New York: Basic Books, 1987.

Etzold, Thomas H. *Defense or Delusion?: America's Military in the 1980s*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1982.

Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

_____. *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1999.

Feaver, Peter D., and Richard H. Kohn, eds. *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

Garofolo Jr., John Joseph. *Telling War Stories: How the United States Military and Hollywood Produce a Warrior Culture*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2000.

Goldstein, Joshua. *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Greven, David. *Manhood in Hollywood from Bush to Bush*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.

Guilaine, Jean, and Jean Zammit. *The Origins of War*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Hellmann, John. *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978.

Higate, Paul R. *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003.

Hixson, Walter L. *Historical Memory and Representations of the Vietnam War*. Vol. 6. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000.

Hoganson, Kristin L. *Fighting for American Manhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

Huebner, Andrew J. *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture From the Second World War to the Vietnam Era*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

Jarvis, Christina S. *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004.

Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

_____. *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

_____. "Telling the War Story." In *It's Our Military Too!* edited by Judith Stiehm, 220-234. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996.

Johnson, Dominic D. P. *Failing to Win*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Johnson, Haynes. *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. London, UK: Penguin Books, 1997.

Kauffman, William W. *Defense in the 1980s*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 1981.

Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

King, Claire Sisco. *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and Cinema*. Brunswich, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011.

Lanning, Michael Lee. *Vietnam at the Movies*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994.

Lewis, Adrian R. *The American Culture of War: The History of U.S. Military Force From World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom.* 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Logevall, Fredrik. *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Martin, Andrew. *Receptions of War: Vietnam in American Culture*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

Millet Allan R., and Peter Maslowski. *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America*. New York: The Free Press, 1984.

Morag, Raya. *Defeated Masculinity: Post-Traumatic Cinema in the Aftermath of War*. Brussels, Belgium: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009.

O'Nan, Stewart. *The Vietnam Reader*. New York: First Anchor Books Edition, 1998.

Olson, James. *The Vietnam War: Handbook of the Literature and Research*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Palmer, William J. *The Films of the Eighties*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1995.

Prince, Stephen. *American Cinema of the 1980s: Themes and Variations*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Reeser, Todd W. *Masculinities in Theory*. United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Reumman, Miriam G. *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2005.

Rollins, Peter C. *Why We Fought: America's Wars in Film and History*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008.

Rowe, John Carlos, and Richard Berg. *The Vietnam War and American Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Ryan, Michael, and Douglas Kellner. "Vietnam and the New Militarism." In *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, edited by David J. Slocum, 239-256. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Schatz Thomas, "World War II and the Hollywood 'War Film'." In *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, edited by David J. Slocum, 147-156. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Scheff, Thomas J. *Bloody Revenge: Emotions, Nationalism, and War*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994.

Shafer, D. Michael, ed. *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1990.

Shary, Timothy. *Millennial Masculinity: Men in Contemporary American Cinema*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2012.

Slocum, David J., ed. *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Tasker, Yvonne. *Soldiers' Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television Since World War II*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Taylor, Bruce. "The Vietnam War Movie." In *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination*, edited by D. Michael Shafer, 186-208. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1990.

Taylor, Mark. *The Vietnam War in History, Literature, and Film*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003.

Toplin, Robert Brent. *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

Troy, Gil. *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Wesson, Robert, ed. *U.S. Influence in Latin America in the 1980s*. New York: Paeger Publishers, 1982.

Wetta, Frank J., and Stephen J. Curley. *Celluloid Wars: A Guide to Film and the American Experience of War*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992.

Wiest, Andrew A., Mary Kathryn Barbier, and Glenn Robins, eds. *America and the Vietnam War: Re-examining the Culture and History of a Generation.* London, UK: Routledge, 2009.

Willbanks, James H. *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004.

_____. *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

_____. *Vietnam War: The Essential Reference Guide*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013.

Periodicals

Barry, Dan, Serge F. Kovaleski, Campbell Robertson, and Lizette Alvarez. "Race, Tragedy, and Outrage Collide After a Shot in Florida." *New York Times,* April 1, 2012. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-prompts-a-review-of-ideals.html.

Boonstra, Heather D., and Elizabeth Nash. "A Surge of State Abortion Restrictions Puts Providers—and the Women They Serve—in the Crosshairs." *Guttmacher Policy Review* 17, no. 1 (Winter 2014). Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/17/1/gpr170109.html.

Brook, Tom Vanden. "Military Approves Hormone Therapy for Chelsea Manning." *USA Today,* February 13, 2015. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/02/12/chelsea-manning-hormone-therapy/23311813/.

Eilprin, Juliet. "Transgender in the Military: A Pentagon in Transition Weights its Policy." *Washington Post*, April 9, 2015. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transgender-in-the-military-a-pentagon-in-transition-weighs-its-policy/2015/04/09/ee0ca39e-cf0d-11e4-8c54-ffb5ba6f2f69_story.html.

Liptak, Adam. "Gay Marriage Arguments Divide Supreme Court Justices." *New York Times,* April 28, 2015. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/29/us/supreme-court-same-sex-marriage.html?gwh=EFB14AC7849B484B5318175486803FAB&gwt=pay&assetType=nyt_now.

Lopez, C. Todd, and Julia Henning. "Arms Describes Integrating Women into Combat." *Army Times,* June 18, 2013. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.army.mil/article/105814/.

Mendible, Myra. "Post Vietnam Syndrome: National Identity, War, and the Politics of Humiliation." *Radical Psychology: A Journal Of Psychology, Politics and Radicalism* 7, no. 2 (2008): 4. Accessed December 5, 2014. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

Michaels, Jim. "Army Opens Legendary Ranger School to Women." *USA Today,* January 15, 2015. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/01/15/combat-women-army-ranger-school/21814747/.

Morgan, Edward P. "American's Post-Vietnam Stress Disorder." *Peace Review* 8, no. 2 (1996): 237-243. Accessed December 15, 2014. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

Mueller, Benjamin, and John Surico. "Over 140 Arrested as New Yorkers Protest the Death of Freddie Gray." *New York Times,* April 30, 2015. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/30/nyregion/hundreds-march-in-manhattan-to-protest-the-death-of-freddie-gray.html.

Porter, Bruce D. "The Warfare State." *American Heritage* 45, no. 4 (July/August 1994). Accessed December 5, 2014. http://www.americanheritage.com/content/warfare-state.

Raines, Howell. "Reagan Vows U.S. will Press Effort to Build Defenses." *New York Times,* May 28, 1981. Accessed April 3, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/28/us/reagan-vows-us-will-press-effort-to-build-defenses.html.

Robles, Frances, and Julie Bosman. "Autopsy Shows Michael Brown Was Struck at Least 6 Times." *New York Times,* August, 19, 2014. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/18/us/michael-brown-autopsy-shows-he-was-shot-at-least-6-times.html.

Roy, Jessica. "What I learned as a Woman at a Men's Rights Conference." *Time,* July 2, 2014. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://time.com/2949435/what-i-learned-as-a-woman-at-a-mens-rights-conference/.

Schwartz, John. "Between the Lines of the Defense of Marriage Act Opinion." *New York Times,* June 26, 2013. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/06/26/us/annotated-supreme-court-decision-on-doma.html.

Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. "Obama Signs Away 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.'" *New York Times,* December 22, 2010. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/23/us/politics/23military.html.

Walsh, Deirdre. "House Passes Bill Banning Abortions After 20 Weeks." *CNN*, May 14, 2015. Accessed May 16, 2015. http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/13/politics/house-gop-abortion-20-weeks/.

Williams, Paul. "'What A Bummer for the Gooks': Representations of White American Masculinity and the Vietnamese in the Vietnam War Film Genre 1977-87." *European Journal Of American Culture* 22, no. 3 (2003): 215-234. Accessed December 15, 2014. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

Films

Born on the Fourth of July. Directed by Oliver Stone. Universal Pictures, 1989. DVD. Universal Studios, 2004.

Casualties of War. Directed by Brian DePalma. Columbia Pictures, 1989. DVD. Sony, 2006.

Full Metal Jacket. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Warner Brothers Pictures, 1987. DVD. Warner Brother Pictures, 2007.

Hamburger Hill. Directed by John Irvin. Paramount Pictures, 1987. DVD. Lionsgate, 2007.

Platoon. Directed by Oliver Stone. Orion Pictures Corporation, 1986. Blu-Ray. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, Inc., 2011.

Online Sources

Internet Movie Database. *American Sniper,* 2014. Accessed April 26, 2015. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2179136/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

_____. *Fury,* 2014. Accessed April 26, 2015. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2713180/.

_____. *Lone Survivor,* 2013. Accessed April 26, 2015. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1091191/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

_____. *The Hurt Locker,* 2008. Accessed April 26, 2015. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0887912/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

John F. Kennedy Museum and Library. "Excerpt, 1960 Democratic National Convention, 15 July 1960." July 15, 1960. Accessed March 25, 2015. http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/AS08q5oYz0SFUZg9uOi4iw.aspx.

The National WWII Museum. "By the Numbers: The U.S. Military: U.S. Military Personnel (1939-1945)." Accessed February 27, 2015. http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/ww2-by-the-numbers/us-military.html.